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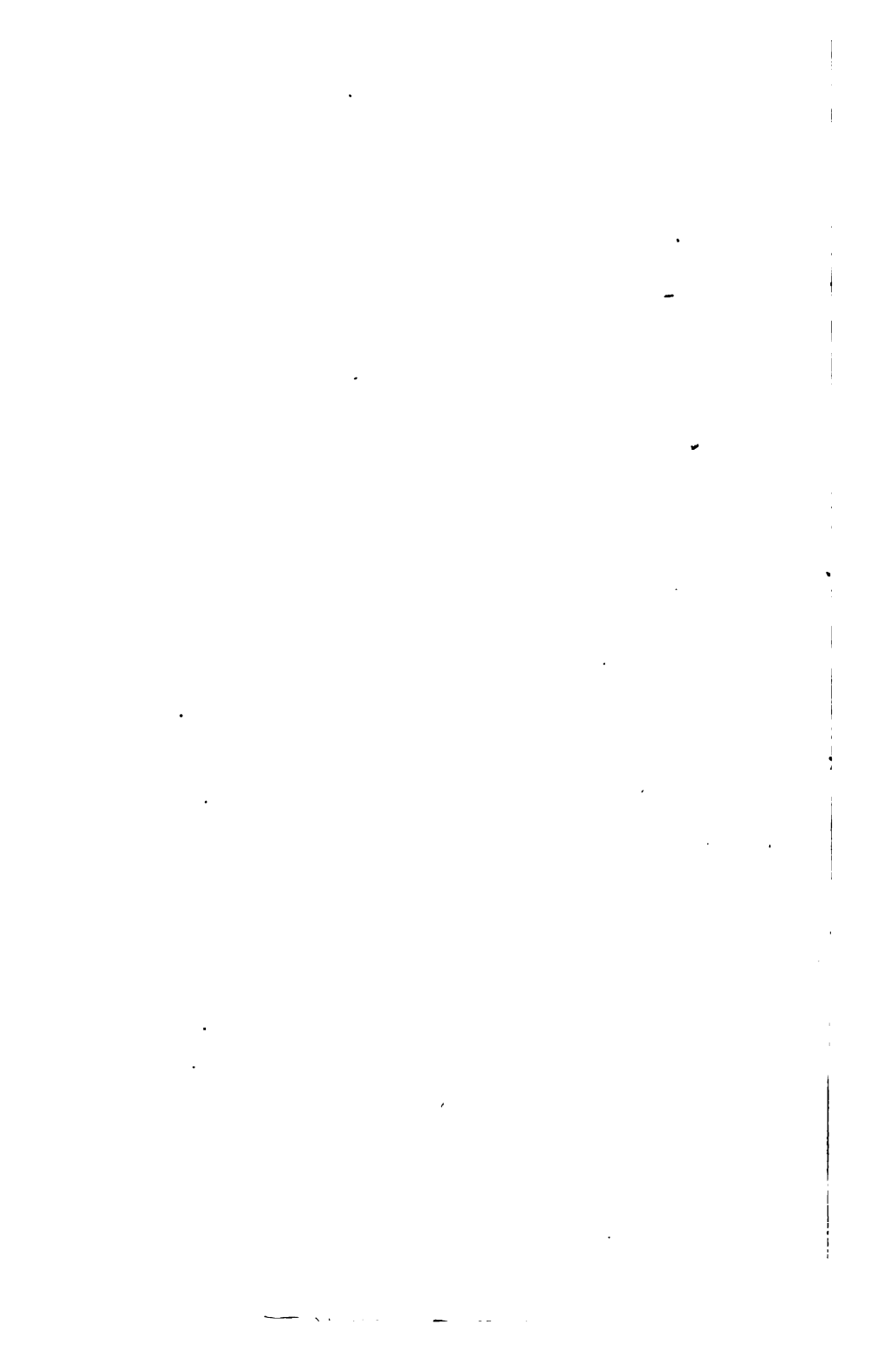
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CASTLE RICHMOND.



VOLUME THE SECOND.



CASTLE RICHMOND.

A Novel.

BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF 'BARCHESTER TOWERS,' 'DOCTOR THORNE,' 'THE WEST
INDIES AND THE SPANISH MAIN,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CASTLE RICHMOND.

CHAPTER I.

DIPLOMACY.

ABOUT a week after the last conversation that has been related as having taken place at the Kanturk Hotel, Mr. Mollett junior was on his way to Castle Richmond. He had on that occasion stated his intention of making such a journey with the view of 'freshening the old gentleman up a bit;' and although his father did all in his power to prevent the journey, going so far on one occasion as to swear that if it was made he would throw over the game altogether, nevertheless Aby persevered.

'You may leave the boards whenever you like, governor,' said Aby. 'I know quite enough of the part to carry on the play.'

'You think you do,' said the father in his anger; 'but you'll find yourself in the dark yet before you've done.'

And then again he expostulated in a different

tone. 'You'll ruin it all, Aby; you will indeed; you don't know all the circumstances; indeed you don't.'

'Don't I?' said Aby. 'Then I'll not be long learning them.'

The father did what he could; but he had no means of keeping his son at home, and so Aby went. Aby doubtless entertained an idea that his father was deficient in pluck for the management of so difficult a matter, and that he could supply what his father wanted. So he dressed himself in his best, and having hired a gig and a man who he flattered himself would look like a private servant, he started from Cork, and drove himself to Castle Richmond.

He had on different occasions been down in the neighbourhood, prowling about like a thief in the night, picking up information as he called it, and seeing how the land lay; but he had never yet presented himself to any one within the precincts of the Castle Richmond demesne. His present intention was to drive up to the front door, and ask at once for Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, sending in his card if need be, on which were printed the words:—

MR. ABRAHAM MOLLETT, Junior.

With the additional words, 'Piccadilly, London,' written in the left-hand lower corner.

‘I’ll take the bull by the horns,’ said he to himself. ‘It’s better to make the spoon at once, even if we do run some small chance of spoiling the horn.’ And that he might be well enabled to carry out his purpose with reference to this bull, he lifted his flask to his mouth as soon as he had passed through the great demesne gate, and took a long pull at it. ‘There’s nothing like a little jumping powder,’ he said, speaking to himself again, and then he drove boldly up the avenue.

He had not yet come in sight of the house when he met two gentlemen walking on the road. They, as he approached, stood a little on one side, not only so as to allow him to pass, but to watch him as he did so. They were Mr. Somers and Herbert Fitzgerald.

‘It is the younger of those two men. I’m nearly certain of it,’ said Somers as the gig approached. ‘I saw him as he walked by me in Kanturk Street, and I don’t think I can mistake the horrid impudence of his face. I beg your pardon, sir,—and now he addressed Mollett in the gig—‘but are you going up to the house?’

‘Yes, sir; that’s my notion just at present. Any commands that way?’

‘This is Mr. Fitzgerald—Mr. Herbert Fitzgerald; and I am Mr. Somers, the agent. Can we do anything for you?’

Aby Mollett raised his hat, and the two gentle-

men touched theirs. 'Thank'ee, sir,' said Aby; 'but I believe my business must be with the worthy baro-nett himself; more particularly as I 'appen to know that he's at home.'

'My father is not very well,' said Herbert, 'and I do not think that he will be able to see you.'

'I'll take the liberty of hasking and of sending in my card,' said Aby; and he gave his horse a flick as intending thus to cut short the conversation. But Mr. Somers had put his hand upon the bridle, and the beast was contented to stand still.

'If you'll have the kindness to wait a moment,' said Mr. Somers; and he put on a look of severity, which he well knew how to assume, and which somewhat cowed poor Aby. 'You have been down here before, I think,' continued Mr. Somers.

'What, at Castle Richmond? No, I haven't. And if I had, what's that to you if Sir Thomas chooses to see me? I hain't hintruding, I suppose.'

'You've been down at Kanturk before—once or twice; for I have seen you.'

'And supposing I've been there ten or twelve times,—what is there in that?' said Aby.

Mr. Somers still held the horse's head, and stood a moment considering.

‘I’ll thank you to let go my ’oss,’ said Aby raising his whip and shaking the reins.

‘What do you say your name is?’ asked Mr. Somers.

‘I didn’t say my name was anything yet. I hain’t ashamed of it, however, nor hasn’t hany cause to be. That’s my name, and if you’ll send my card into Sir Thomas, with my compliments, and say that hi’ve three words to say to him very particular; why hi’ll be obliged to you.’ And then Mr. Mollett handed Mr. Somers his card.

‘Mollett!’ said Mr. Somers very unceremoniously. ‘Mollett, Mollett. Dq you know the name, Herbert?’

Herbert said that he did not.

‘It’s about business I suppose?’ asked Mr. Somers.

‘Yes,’ said Aby; ‘private business; very particular.’

‘The same that brought your father here;’ and Mr. Somers again looked into his face with a close scrutiny.

Aby was abashed, and for a moment or two he did not answer. ‘Well, then; it is the same business,’ he said at last. ‘And I’ll thank you to let me go on. I’m not used to be stopped in this way.’

‘You can follow us up to the house,’ said Mr. Somers to him. ‘Come here, Herbert.’ And

then they walked along the road in such a way that Aby was forced to allow his horse to walk after them.

‘These are the men who are doing it,’ said Mr. Somers in a whisper to his companion. ‘Whatever is in the wind, whatever may be the cause of your father’s trouble, they are concerned in it. They are probably getting money from him in some way.’

‘Do you think so?’

‘I do. We must not force ourselves upon your father’s confidence, but we must endeavour to save him from this misery. Do you go into him with this card. Do not show it to him too suddenly; and then find out whether he really wishes to see the man. I will stay about the place; for it may be possible that a magistrate will be wanted, and in such a matter you had better not act.’

They were now at the hall-door, and Somers, turning to Mollett, told him that Mr. Herbert Fitzgerald would carry the card to his father. And then he added, seeing that Mollett was going to come down, ‘You had better stay in the gig till Mr. Fitzgerald comes back; just sit where you are; you’ll get an answer all in good time.’

Sir Thomas was crouching over the fire in his study when his son entered, with his eyes fixed

upon a letter which he held in his hand, and which, when he saw Herbert, he closed up and put away.

‘Father,’ said Herbert, in a cheerful every-day voice, as though he had nothing special to communicate, ‘there is a man in a gig out there. He says he wants to see you.’

‘A man in a gig!’ and Herbert could see that his father had already begun to tremble. But every sound made him tremble now.

‘Yes; a man in a gig. What is it he says his name is? I have his card here. A young man.’

‘Oh, a young man?’ said Sir Thomas.

‘Yes, here it is. Abraham Mollett. I can’t say that your friend seems to be very respectable, in spite of his gig,’ and Herbert handed the card to his father.

The son purposely looked away as he mentioned the name, as his great anxiety was not to occasion distress. But he felt that the sound of the word had been terrible in his father’s ears. Sir Thomas had risen from his chair; but he now sat down again, or rather fell into it. But nevertheless he took the card, and said that he would see the man.

‘A young man do you say, Herbert?’

‘Yes, father, a young man. And, father, if you are not well, tell me what the business is and let me see him.’

But Sir Thomas persisted, shaking his head, and saying that he would see the man himself.

‘Somers is out there. Will you let him do it?’

‘No. I wonder, Herbert, that you can tease me so. Let the man be sent in here. But, oh, Herbert—Herbert——!’

The young man rushed round and kneeled at his father’s knee. ‘What is it, father? Why will you not tell me? I know you have some grief, and cannot you trust me? Do you not know that you can trust me?’

‘My poor boy, my poor boy!’

‘What is it, father? If this man here is concerned in it, let me see him.’

‘No, no, no.’

‘Or at any rate let me be with you when he is here. Let me share your trouble if I can do nothing to cure it.’

‘Herbert, my darling, leave me and send him in. If it be necessary that you should bear this calamity, it will come upon you soon enough.’

‘But I am afraid of this man—for your sake, father.’

‘He will do me no harm; let him come to me. But, Herbert, say nothing to Somers about this. Somers has not seen the man; has he?’

‘Yes; we both spoke to him together as he drove up the avenue.’

‘And what did he say? Did he say anything?’

‘Nothing but that he wanted to see you, and then he gave his card to Mr. Somers. Mr. Somers wished to save you from the annoyance.’

‘Why should it annoy me to see any man? Let Mr. Somers mind his own business. Surely I can have business of my own without his interference.’ With this Herbert left his father, and returned to the hall-door to usher in Mr. Mollett junior.

‘Well?’ said Mr. Somers, who was standing by the hall fire, and who joined Herbert at the front door.

‘My father will see the man.’

‘And have you learned who he is?’

‘I have learned nothing but this—that Sir Thomas does not wish that we should inquire. Now, Mr. Mollett, Sir Thomas will see you; so you can come down. Make haste now, and remember that you are not to stay long, for my father is ill.’ And then leading Aby through the hall and along a passage, he introduced him into Sir Thomas’s room.

‘And Herbert—’ said the father; whereupon Herbert again turned round. His father was endeavouring to stand, but supporting himself by the back of his chair. ‘Do not disturb me for half an hour; but come to me then, and knock at

the door. This gentleman will have done by that time.

‘If we do not put a stop to this, your father will be in a mad-house or on his death-bed before long.’ So spoke Mr. Somers in a low, solemn whisper when Herbert again joined him at the hall-door.

‘Sit down, sir; sit down,’ said Sir Thomas, endeavouring to be civil and to seem at his ease at the same time. Aby was himself so much bewildered for the moment, that he hardly perceived the embarrassment under which the baronet was labouring.

Aby sat down, in the way usual to such men in such places, on the corner of his chair, and put his hat on the ground between his feet. Then he took out his handkerchief and blew his nose, and after that he expressed an opinion that he was in the presence of Sir Thomas Fitzgerald.

‘And you are Mr. Abraham Mollett,’ said Sir Thomas.

‘Yes, Sir Thomas, that’s my name. I believe, Sir Thomas, that you have the pleasure of some slight acquaintance with my father, Mr. Matthew Mollett?’

What a pleasure under such circumstances! Sir Thomas, however, nodded his head, and Aby went on.

‘Well, now, Sir Thomas, business is business; and my father, ’e ain’t a good man of business. A

gen'leman like you, Sir Thomas, has seen that with 'alf an eye, I know.' And then he waited a moment for an answer; but as he got none he proceeded.

'My governor's one of the best of fellows going, but 'e ain't sharp and decisive. Sharp's the word now a days, Sir Thomas; ain't it?' and he spoke this in a manner so suited to the doctrine which he intended to inculcate, that the poor old gentleman almost jumped up in his chair.

And Aby, seeing this, seated himself more comfortably in his own. The awe which the gilt bindings of the books and the thorough comfort of the room had at first inspired was already beginning to fade away. He had come there to bully, and though his courage had failed him for a moment under the stern eye of Mr. Somers, it quickly returned to him now that he was able to see how weak was his actual victim.

'Sharp's the word, Sir Thomas; and my governor, 'e ain't sharp—not sharp as he ought to be in such a matter as this. This is what I calls a real bit of cheese. Now it's no good going on piddling and peddling in such a case as this; is it now, Sir Thomas?'

Sir Thomas muttered something, but it was no more than a groan.

'Not the least use,' continued Aby. 'Now

the question, as I takes it, is this. There's your son there as fetched me in 'ere; a fine young gen'loman 'e is, as ever I saw; I will say that. Well, now; who's to have this 'ere property when you walk the plank—as walk it you must some day, in course? Is it to be this son of yours, or is it to be this other Fitzgerald of 'Appy 'Ouse? Now, if you ask me, I'm all for your son, though maybe he mayn't be all right as regards the dam.'

There was certainly some truth in what Aby had said with reference to his father. Mr. Mollett senior had never debated the matter in terms sharp and decisive as these were. Think who they were of whom this brute was talking to that wretched gentleman; the wife of his bosom, than whom no wife was ever more dearly prized; the son of his love, the centre of all his hopes, the heir of his wealth—if that might still be so. And yet he listened to such words as these, and did not call in his servants to turn the speaker of them out of his doors.

'I've no wish for that 'Appy 'Ouse man, Sir Thomas; not the least. And as for your good lady, she's nothing to me one way or the other—whatever she may be to my governor——' and here there fell a spasm upon the poor man's heart, which nearly brought him from the chair to the ground; but, nevertheless, he still contained him-

self—‘my governor’s former lady, my own mother,’ continued Aby, ‘whom I never see’d, she’d gone to kingdom come, you know, before that time, Sir Thomas. There hain’t no doubt about that. So you see——’ and hereupon he dropped his voice from the tone which he had hitherto been using to an absolute whisper, and drawing his chair close to that of the baronet, and putting his hands upon his knees, brought his mouth close to his companion’s ear—‘So you see,’ he said, ‘when that youngster was born, Lady F. was Mrs. M.—wasn’t she? and for the matter of that, Lady F. is Mrs. M. to this very hour. That’s the real chat; ain’t it, Sir Thomas? My stepmother, you know. The governor could take her away with him to-morrow if he chose, according to the law of the land—couldn’t he now?’

There was no piddling or peddling about this at any rate. Old Mollett in discussing the matter with his victim had done so by hints and inuendos, through long windings, by signs and the dropping of a few dark words. He had never once mentioned in full terms the name of Lady Fitzgerald; had never absolutely stated that he did possess or ever had possessed a wife. It had been sufficient for him to imbue Sir Thomas with the knowledge that his son Herbert was in great danger as to his heritage. Doubtless the two had understood

each other; but the absolute naked horror of the surmised facts had been kept delicately out of sight. But such delicacy was not to Aby's taste. Sharp, short, and decisive; that was his motto. No 'longæ ambages' for him. The whip was in his hand, as he thought, and he could best master the team by using it.

And yet Sir Thomas lived and bore it. As he sat there half stupefied, numbed as it were by the intensity of his grief, he wondered at his own power of endurance. 'She is Mrs. M., you know; ain't she now?' He could sit there and hear that, and yet live through it. So much he could do, and did do; but as for speaking, that was beyond him.

Young Mollett thought that this 'freshening up of the old gentleman' seemed to answer; so he continued. 'Yes, Sir Thomas, your son's my favourite, I tell you fairly. But then, you know, if I backs the favourite, in course I likes to win upon him. How is it to be, now?' and then he paused for an answer, which, however, was not forthcoming.

'You see you haven't been dealing quite on the square with the governor. You two is, has it were, in a boat together. We'll call that boat the Lady F., or the Mrs. M., which ever you like;—and then Aby laughed, for the conceit pleased him—'but the hearnings of that boat

should be divided hequally. Ain't that about the ticket? heh, Sir Thomas? Come, don't be down on your luck. A little quiet talkee-talkie between you and me'll soon put this small matter on a right footing.'

'What is it you want? tell me at once,' at last groaned the poor man.

'Well now, that's something like; and I'll tell you what we want. There are only two of us you know, the governor and I; and very lonely we are, for it's a sad thing for a man to have the wife of his bosom taken from him.'

Then there was a groan which struck even Aby's ear; but Sir Thomas was still alive and listening, and so he went on.

'This property here, Sir Thomas, is a good twelve thousand a year. I know hall about it as though I'd been 'andling it myself for the last ten years. And a great deal of cutting there is in twelve thousand a year. You've 'ad your whack out of it, and now we wants to have hourn. That's Henglish, hain't it?'

'Did your father send you here, Mr. Mollett?'

'Never you mind who sent me, Sir Thomas. Perhaps he did, and perhaps he didn't. Perhaps I came without hany sending. Perhaps I'm more hup to this sort of work than he is. At any rate, I've got the part pretty well by 'eart—you see

that, don't you? Well, hour ultimatum about the business is this. Forty thousand pounds paid down on the nail, half to the governor, and half to your 'umble servant, before the end of this year; a couple of thousand more in hand for the year's hexpenses—and—and—a couple of hundred or so now at once before I leave you; for to tell the truth we're run huncommonly dry just at the present moment.' And then Aby drew his breath and paused for an answer.

Poor Sir Thomas was now almost broken down. His head swam round and round, and he felt that he was in a whirlpool from which there was no escape. He had heard the sum named, and knew that he had no power of raising it. His interest in the estate was but for his life, and that life was now all but run out. He had already begun to feel that his son must be sacrificed, but he had struggled and endured in order that he might save his wife. But what could he do now? What further struggle could he make? His present most eager desire was that that horrid man should be removed from his hearing and his eyesight.

But Aby had not yet done: he had hitherto omitted to mention one not inconsiderable portion of the amicable arrangement which, according to him, would have the effect of once more placing the two families comfortably on their feet. 'There's

one other pint, Sir Thomas,' he continued, 'and hif I can bring you and your good lady to my way of thinking on that, why, we may all be comfortable for all that is come and gone. You've a daughter Hemmeline.'

'What!' said Sir Thomas, turning upon him; for there was still so much of life left in him that he could turn upon his foe when he heard his daughter's name thus polluted.

'Has lovely a gal to my way of thinking as my heyes ever rested on; and I'm not haccounted a bad judge of such cattle, I can tell you, Sir Thomas.'

'That will do, that will do,' said Sir Thomas, attempting to rise, but still holding on by the back of his chair. 'You can go now, sir; I cannot hear more from you.'

'Go!'

'Yes, sir; go.'

'I know a trick worth two of that, Sir Thomas. If you like to give me your daughter Hemmeline for my wife, whatever her fortin's to be, I'll take it as part of my half of the forty thousand pounds. There now.' And then Aby again waited for a reply.

But now there came a knock at the door, and following quick upon the knock Herbert entered the room. 'Well, father,' said the son.

'Herbert!'

‘Yes, father ;’ and he went round and supported his father on his arm.

‘Herbert, will you tell that man to go ?’

‘Come, sir, you have disturbed my father enough ; will you have the kindness to leave him now ?’

‘I may chance to disturb him more, and you too, sir, if you treat me in that way. Let go my arm, sir. Am I to have any answer from you, Sir Thomas ?’

But Sir Thomas could make no further attempt at speaking. He was now once more seated in his chair, holding his son’s hand, and when he again heard Mollett’s voice he merely made a sign for him to go.

‘You see the state my father is in, Mr. Mollett,’ said Herbert ; ‘I do not know what is the nature of your business, but whatever it may be, you must leave him now.’ And he made a slight attempt to push the visitor towards the door.

‘You’d better take care what you’re doing, Mr. Fitzgerald,’ said Mollett. ‘By —— you had ! If you anger me, I might say a word that I couldn’t unsay again, which would put you into queer street, I can tell you.’

‘Don’t quarrel with him, my boy ; pray don’t quarrel with him, but let him leave me,’ said Sir Thomas.

‘Mr. Mollett, you see my father’s state ; you

must be aware that it is imperative that he should be left alone.'

'I don't know nothing about that, young gen'leman; business is business, and I hain't got hany answer to my proposals. Sir Thomas, do you say "Yes" to them proposals.' But Sir Thomas was still dumb. 'To all but the last? Come,' continued Aby, 'that was put in quite as much for your good as it was for mine.' But not a word came from the baronet.

'Then I shan't stir,' said Aby, again seating himself.

'Then I shall have the servants in,' said Herbert, 'and a magistrate who is in the hall;' and he put his hand towards the handle of the bell.

'Well, as the old gen'leman's hill, I'll go now and come again. But look you here, Sir Thomas, you have got my proposals, and if I don't get an answer to them in three days' time, —why you'll hear from me in another way, that's all. And so will her ladyship.' And with this threat Mr. Abraham Mollett allowed himself to be conducted through the passage into the hall, and from thence to his gig.

'See that he drives away; see that he goes,' said Herbert to Mr. Somers, who was still staying about the place.

'Oh, I'll drive away fast enough,' said Aby, as

he stepped into the gig, 'and come back fast enough too,' he muttered to himself. In the mean time Herbert had run back to his father's room.'

'Has he gone?' murmured Sir Thomas.

'Yes, he has gone. There; you can hear the wheels of his gig on the gravel.'

'Oh, my boy, my poor boy!'

'What is it, father? Why do you not tell me? Why do you allow such men as that to come and harass you, when a word would keep them from you? Father, good cannot come of it.'

'No, Herbert, no; good will not come of it. There is no good to come at all.'

'Then why will you not tell us?'

'You will know it all soon enough. But Herbert, do not say a word to your mother. Not a word as you value my love. Let us save her while we can. You promise me that.'

Herbert gave him the required promise.

'Look here,' and he took up the letter which he had before crumpled in his hand. 'Mr. Prendergast will be here next week. I shall tell everything to him.'

Soon afterwards Sir Thomas went to his bed, and there by his bedside his wife sat for the rest of the evening. But he said no word to her of his sorrow.

‘ Mr. Prendergast is coming here,’ said Herbert to Mr. Somers.

‘ I am glad of it, though I do not know him,’ said Mr. Somers. ‘ For, my dear boy, it is necessary that there should be some one here.’

CHAPTER II.

THE PATH BENEATH THE ELMS.

It will be remembered that in the last chapter but one Owen Fitzgerald left Lady Desmond in the drawing-room at Desmond Court somewhat abruptly, having absolutely refused to make peace with the Desmond faction by giving his consent to the marriage between Clara and his cousin Herbert. And it will perhaps be remembered also, that Lady Desmond had asked for this consent in a manner that was almost humble. She had shown herself most anxious to keep on friendly terms with the rake of Hap House,—rake and roué, gambler and spendthrift, as he was reputed to be,—if only he would abandon his insane claim to the hand of Clara Desmond. But this feeling she had shown when they two were alone together, after Clara had left them. As long as her daughter had been present, Lady Desmond had maintained her tone of indignation and defiance; but, when the door was closed and they

two were alone, she had become kind in her language and almost tender.

My readers will probably conceive that she had so acted, overcome by her affection for Owen Fitzgerald and with a fixed resolve to win him for herself. Men and women when they are written about are always supposed to have fixed resolves, though in life they are so seldom found to be thus armed. To speak the truth, the countess had had no fixed resolve in the matter, either when she had thought about Owen's coming, or when, subsequently, she had found herself alone with him in her drawing-room. That Clara should not marry him,—on so much she had resolved long ago. But all danger on that head was, it may be said, over. Clara, like a good child, had behaved in the best possible manner; had abandoned her first lover, a lover that was poor and unfitted for her, as soon as told to do so; and had found for herself a second lover, who was rich, and proper, and in every way desirable. As regards Clara, the countess felt herself to be safe; and, to give her her due, she had been satisfied that the matter should so rest. She had not sought any further interview with Fitzgerald. He had come there against her advice, and she had gone to meet him prompted by the necessity of supporting her daughter; and without any other views of her own.

But when she found herself alone with him ; when she looked into his face, and saw how handsome, how noble, how good it was—good in its inherent manliness and bravery—she could not but long that this feud should be over, and that she might be able once more to welcome him as her friend. If only he would give up this frantic passion, this futile, wicked, senseless attempt to make them all wretched by an insane marriage, would it not be sweet again to make some effort to rescue him from the evil ways into which he had fallen ?

But Owen himself would make no response to this feeling. Clara Desmond was his love, and he would, of his own consent, yield her to no one. In truth, he was, in a certain degree, mad on this subject. He did think that because the young girl had given him a promise—had said to him a word or two which he called a promise—she was now of right his bride ; that there belonged to him an indefeasible property in her heart, in her loveliness, in the inexpressible tenderness of her young springing beauty, of which no subsequent renouncing on her part could fairly and honestly deprive him. That others should oppose the match was intelligible to him ; but it was hardly intelligible that she should betray him. And, as yet, he did not believe that she herself was the mainspring of this renouncing. Others,

the countess and the Castle Richmond people, had frightened her into falseness ; and, therefore, it became him to maintain his right by any means—almost by any means, within his power. Give her up of his own free will and voice ! Say that Herbert Fitzgerald should take her with his consent ! that she should go as a bride to Castle Richmond, while he stood by and smiled, and wished them joy ! Never ! And so he rode away with a stern heart, leaving her standing there with something of sternness about her heart also.

In the meantime, Clara, when she was sure that her rejected suitor was well away from the place, put on her bonnet and walked out. It was her wont at this time to do so ; and she was becoming almost a creature of habit, shut up as she was in that old dreary barrack. Her mother very rarely went with her ; and she habitually performed the same journey over the same ground, at the same hour, day after day. So it had been, and so it was still,—unless Herbert Fitzgerald were with her.

On the present occasion she saw no more of her mother before she left the house. She passed the drawing-room door, and seeing that it was ajar, knew that the countess was there ; but she had nothing to say to her mother as to the late interview, unless her mother had aught to

say to her. So she passed on. In truth her mother had nothing to say to her. She was sitting there alone, with her head resting on her hand, with that sternness at her heart and a cloud upon her brow, but she was not thinking of her daughter. Had she not, with her skill and motherly care, provided well for Clara? Had she not saved her daughter from all the perils which beset the path of a young girl? Had she not so brought her child up and put her forth into the world, that, portionless as that child was, all the best things of the world had been showered into her lap? Why should the countess think more of her daughter? It was of herself she was thinking; and of what her life would be all alone, absolutely alone, in that huge frightful home of hers, without a friend, almost without an acquaintance, without one soul near her whom she could love or who would love her. She had put out her hand to Owen Fitzgerald, and he had rejected it. Her he had regarded merely as the mother of the woman he loved. And then the Countess of Desmond began to ask herself if she were old and wrinkled and ugly, only fit to be a dowager in mind, body, and in name!

Over the same ground! Yes, always over the same ground. Lady Clara never varied her walk. It went from the front entrance of the court, with one great curve, down to the old

ruined lodge which opened on to the road running from Kantark to Cork. It was here that the row of elm trees stood, and it was here that she had once walked with a hot, eager lover beside her, while a docile horse followed behind their feet. It was here that she walked daily ; and was it possible that she should walk here without thinking of him ?

It was always on the little well-worn path by the road-side, not on the road itself, that she took her measured exercise ; and now, as she went along, she saw on the moist earth the fresh prints of a horse's hoofs. He also had ridden down the same way, choosing to pass over the absolute spot in which those words had been uttered, thinking of that moment, as she also was thinking of it. She felt sure that such had been the case. She knew that it was this that had brought him there—there on to the foot-traces which they had made together.

And did he then love her so truly,—with a love so hot, so eager, so deeply planted in his very soul ? Was it really true that a passion for her had so filled his heart, that his whole life must by that be made or marred ? Had she done this thing to him ? Had she so impressed her image on his mind that he must be wretched without her ? Was she so much to him, so completely all in all as regarded his future worldly happiness ? Those

words of his, asserting that love—her love—was to him a stern fact, a deep necessity—recurred over and over again to her mind. Could it really be that in doing as she had done, in giving herself to another after she had promised herself to him, she had committed an injustice which would constantly be brought up against her by him and by her own conscience? Had she in truth deceived and betrayed him,—deserted him because he was poor, and given herself over to a rich lover because of his riches?

As she thought of this she forgot again that fact—which, indeed, she had never more than half realized in her mind—that he had justified her in separating herself from him by his reckless course of living; that his conduct must be held to have so justified her, let the pledge between them have been of what nature it might. Now, as she walked up and down that path, she thought nothing of his wickedness and his sins; she thought only of the vows to which she had once listened, and the renewal of those vows to which it was now so necessary that her ear should be deaf.

But was her heart deaf to them? She swore to herself, over and over again, scores and scores of oaths, that it was so; but each time that she swore, some lowest corner in the depth of her conscience seemed to charge her with a falsehood. Why was it that in all her hours of thinking she

so much oftener saw his face, Owen's, than she did that other face of which in duty she was bound to think and dream? It was in vain that she told herself that she was afraid of Owen, and therefore thought of him. The tone of his voice that rang in her ears the oftenest was not that of his anger and sternness, but the tone of his first assurance of love—that tone which had been so inexpressibly sweet to her—that to which she had listened on this very spot where she now walked slowly, thinking of him. The look of his which was ever present to her eyes was not that on which she had almost feared to gaze but an hour ago; but the form and spirit which his countenance had worn when they were together on that well-remembered day.

And then she would think, or try to think, of Herbert, and of all his virtues and of all his goodness. He too loved her well. She never doubted that. He had come to her with soft words, and pleasant smiles, and sweet honeyed compliments—compliments which had been sweet to her as they are to all girls; but his soft words, and pleasant smiles, and honeyed love-making had never given her so strong a thrill of strange delight as had those few words from Owen. Her very heart's core had been affected by the vigour of his affection. There had been in it a mysterious grandeur which had half charmed and

and half frightened her. It had made her feel that he, were it fated that she should belong to him, would indeed be her lord and ruler; that his was a spirit before which hers would bend and feel itself subdued. With him she could realize all that she had dreamed of woman's love; and that dream which is so sweet to some women—of woman's subjugation. But could it be the same with him to whom she was now positively affianced, with him to whom she knew that she did now owe all her duty? She feared that it was not the same.

And then again she swore that she loved him. She thought over all his excellences; how good he was as a son—how fondly his sisters loved him—how inimitable was his conduct in these hard trying times. And she remembered also that it was right in every way that she should love him. Her mother and brother approved of it. Those who were to be her new relatives approved of it. It was in every way fitting. Pecuniary considerations were so favourable! But when she thought of that her heart sank low within her breast. Was it true that she had sold herself at her mother's bidding? Should not the remembrance of Owen's poverty have made her true to him had nothing else done so?

But be all that as it might, one thing, at any rate, was clear to her, that it was now her fate,

her duty—and, as she repeated again and again, her wish to marry Herbert. No thought of rebellion against him and her mother ever occurred to her as desirable or possible. She would be to him a true and loving wife, a wife in very heart and soul. But, nevertheless, walking thus beneath those trees, she could not but think of Owen Fitzgerald.

In this mood she had gone twice down from the house to the lodge and back again; and now again she had reached the lodge the third time, making thus her last journey: for in these solitary walks her work was measured. The exercise was needful, but there was little in the task to make her prolong it beyond what was necessary. But now, as she was turning for the last time, she heard the sound of a horse's hoof coming fast along the road; and looking from the gate, she saw that Herbert was coming to her. She had not expected him, but now she waited at the gate to meet him.

It had been arranged that she was to go over in a few days to Castle Richmond, and stay there for a fortnight. This had been settled shortly before the visit made by Mr. Mollett junior, at that place, and had not as yet been unsettled. But as soon as it was known that Sir Thomas had summoned Mr. Prendergast from London, it was felt by them all that it would be as well that

Clara's visit should be postponed. Herbert had been especially cautioned by his father, at the time of Mollett's visit, not to tell his mother anything of what had occurred, and to a certain extent he had kept his promise. But it was of course necessary that Lady Fitzgerald should know that Mr. Prendergast was coming to the house, and it was of course impossible to keep from her the fact that his visit was connected with the lamentable state of her husband's health and spirits. Indeed, she knew as much as that without any telling. It was not probable that Mr. Prendergast should come there now on a visit of pleasure.

'Whatever this may be that weighs upon his mind,' Herbert had said, 'he will be better for talking it over with a man whom he trusts.'

'And why not with Somers?' said Lady Fitzgerald.

'Somers is too often with him, too near to him in all the affairs of his life. I really think he is wise to send for Mr. Prendergast. We do not know him, but I believe him to be a good man.'

Then Lady Fitzgerald had expressed herself as satisfied—as satisfied as she could be, seeing that her husband would not take her into his confidence; and after this it was settled that Herbert should at once ride over to Desmond

Court, and explain that Clara's visit had better be postponed.

Herbert got off his horse at the gate, and gave it to one of the children at the lodge to lead after him. His horse would not follow him, Clara said to herself as they walked back together towards the house. She could not prevent her mind running off in that direction. She would fain not have thought of Owen as she thus hung upon Herbert's arm, but as yet she had not learned to control her thoughts. His horse had followed him lovingly—the dogs about the place had always loved him—the men and women of the whole country round, old and young, all spoke of him with a sort of love: everybody admired him. As all this passed through her brain, she was hanging on her accepted lover's arm, and listening to his soft sweet words.

'Oh, yes! it will be much better,' she said, answering his proposal that she should put off her visit to Castle Richmond. 'But I am so sorry that Sir Thomas should be ill. Mr. Prendergast is not a doctor, is he?'

And then Herbert explained that Mr. Prendergast was not a doctor, that he was a physician for the mind rather than for the body. Regarding Clara as already one of his own family, he told her as much as he had told his mother. He explained that there was some deep sorrow

weighing on his father's heart of which they none of them knew anything save its existence; that there might be some misfortune coming on Sir Thomas of which he Herbert could not even guess the nature; but that everything would be told to this Mr. Prendergast.

'It is very sad,' said Herbert.

'Very sad; very sad,' said Clara, with tears in her eyes. 'Poor gentleman! I wish that we could comfort him.'

'And I do hope that we may,' said Herbert. 'Somers seems to think that his mind is partly affected, and that this misfortune, whatever it be, may not improbably be less serious than we anticipate;—that it weighs heavier on him than it would do, were he altogether well.'

'And your mother, Herbert?'

'Oh, yes; she also is to be pitied. Sometimes, for moments, she seems to dread some terrible misfortune; but I believe that in her calm judgment she thinks that our worst calamity is the state of my father's health.'

Neither in discussing the matter with his mother or Clara, nor in thinking it over when alone, did it ever occur to Herbert that he himself might be individually subject to the misfortune over which his father brooded. Sir Thomas had spoken piteously to him, and called him poor, and had seemed to grieve over what

might happen to him ; but this had been taken by the son as a part of his father's malady.

Everything around him was now melancholy, and therefore these terms had not seemed to have any special force of their own. He did not think it necessary to warn Clara that bad days might be in store for both of them, or to caution her that their path of love might yet be made rough.

'And whom do you think I met, just now, on horseback?' he asked, as soon as this question of her visit had been decided.

'Mr. Owen Fitzgerald, probably,' said Clara. 'He went from hence about an hour since.'

'Owen Fitzgerald here!' he repeated, as though the tidings of such a visit having been made were not exactly pleasant to him. 'I thought that Lady Desmond did not even see him now.'

'His visit was to me, Herbert, and I will explain it to you. I was just going to tell you when you first came in, only you began about Castle Richmond.'

'And have you seen him?'

'Oh yes, I saw him. Mamma thought it best. Yesterday he wrote a note to me which I will show you.' And then she gave him such an account of the interview as was possible to her, making it, at any rate, intelligible to him that Owen had come thither to claim her for himself,

having heard the rumour of her engagement to his cousin.

‘It was inexcusable on his part—unpardonable!’ said Herbert, speaking with an angry spot on his face, and with more energy than was usual with him.

‘Was it? why?’ said Clara, innocently. She felt unconsciously that it was painful to her to hear Owen ill spoken of by her lover, and that she would fain excuse him if she could.

‘Why, dearest? Think what motives he could have had; what other object than to place you in a painful position, and to cause trouble and vexation to us all. Did he not know that we were engaged?’

‘Oh yes; he knew that;—at least, no; I am not quite sure—I think he said that he had heard it but did not——’

‘Did not what, love?’

‘I think he said he did not quite believe it;’ and then she was forced, much against her will, to describe to her betrothed how Owen had boldly claimed her as his own.

‘His conduct has been unpardonable,’ said Herbert, again. ‘Nay, it has been ungentlemanlike. He has intruded himself where he well knew that he was not wanted; and he has done so taking advantage of a few words which, under the present circumstances, he should force himself to forget.’

‘But, Herbert, it is I that have been to blame.’

‘No; you have not been in the least to blame. I tell you honestly that I can lay no blame at your door. At the age you were then, it was impossible that you should know your own mind. And even had your promise to him been of a much more binding nature, his subsequent conduct, and your mother’s remonstrance, as well as your own age, would have released you from it without any taint of falsehood. He knew all this as well as I do; and I am surprised that he should have forced his way into your mother’s house with the mere object of causing you embarrassment.’

It was marvellous how well Herbert Fitzgerald could lay down the law on the subject of Clara’s conduct, and on all that was due to her, and all that was not due to Owen. He was the victor; he had gained the prize; and therefore it was so easy for him to acquit his promised bride, and heap reproaches on the head of his rejected rival. Owen had been told that he was not wanted, and of course should have been satisfied with his answer. Why should he intrude himself among happy people with his absurd aspirations? For were they not absurd? Was it not monstrous on his part to suppose that he could marry Clara Desmond?

It was in this way that Herbert regarded the

matter. But it was not exactly in that way that Clara looked at it. 'He did not force his way in,' she said. 'He wrote to ask if we would see him; and mamma said that she thought it better.'

'That is forcing his way in the sense that I meant it; and if I find that he gives further annoyance I shall tell him what I think about it. I will not have you persecuted.'

'Herbert, if you quarrel with him you will make me wretched. I think it would kill me.'

'I shall not do it if I can help it, Clara. But it is my duty to protect you, and if it becomes necessary I must do so; you have no father, and no brother of an age to speak to him, and that consideration alone should have saved you from such an attack.'

Clara said nothing more, for she knew that she could not speak out to him the feelings of her heart. She could not plead to him that she had injured Owen, that she had loved him and then given him up; that she had been false to him: she could not confess that, after all, the tribute of such a man's love could not be regarded by her as an offence. So she said nothing further, but walked on in silence, leaning on his arm.

They were now close to the house, and as they drew near to it Lady Desmond met them on the door-step. 'I dare say you have heard that we had a visitor here this morning,' she said, taking

Herbert's hand in an affectionate motherly way, and smiling on him with all her sweetness.

Herbert said that he had heard it, and expressed an opinion that Mr. Owen Fitzgerald would have been acting far more wisely to have remained at home at Hap House.

'Yes, perhaps so; certainly so,' said Lady Desmond, putting her arm within that of her future son, and walking back with him through the great hall. 'He would have been wiser; he would have saved dear Clara from a painful half-hour, and he would have saved himself from perhaps years of sorrow. He has been very foolish to remember Clara's childhood as he does remember it. But, my dear Herbert, what can we do? You lords of creation sometimes will be foolish even about such trifling things as women's hearts.'

And then, when Herbert still persisted that Owen's conduct had been inexcusable and ungentlemanlike, she softly flattered him into quiescence. 'You must not forget,' she said, 'that he perhaps has loved Clara almost as truly as you do. And then what harm can he do? It is not very probable that he should succeed in winning Clara away from you!'

'Oh no, it is not that I mean. It is for Clara's sake.'

'And she, probably, will never see him again

till she is your wife. That event will, I suppose, take place at no very remote period.'

'As soon as ever my father's health will admit. That is if I can persuade Clara to be so merciful.'

'To tell the truth, Herbert, I think you could persuade her to anything. Of course we must not hurry her too much. As for me, my losing her will be very sad; you can understand that; but I would not allow any feeling of my own to stand in her way for half-an-hour.'

'She will be very near you, you know.'

'Yes, she will; and therefore, as I was saying, it would be absurd for you to quarrel with Mr. Owen Fitzgerald. For myself, I am sorry for him—very sorry for him. You know the whole story of what occurred between him and Clara, and of course you will understand that my duty at that time was plain. Clara behaved admirably, and if only he would not be so foolish, the whole matter might be forgotten. As far as you and I are concerned I think it may be forgotten.'

'But then his coming here?'

'That will not be repeated. I thought it better to show him that we were not afraid of him, and therefore I permitted it. Had I conceived that you would have objected—'

'Oh, no!' said Herbert.

'Well, there was not much for you to be afraid

of, certainly,' said the countess. And so he was appeased, and left the house promising that he, at any rate, would do nothing that might lead to a quarrel with his cousin Owen.

Clara, who had still kept on her bonnet, again walked down with him to the lodge, and encountered his first earnest supplication that an early day should be named for their marriage. She had many reasons, excellent good reasons, to allege why this should not be the case. When was a girl of seventeen without such reasons? And it is so reasonable that she should have such reasons. That period of having love made to her must be by far the brightest in her life. Is it not always a pity that it should be abridged?

'But your father's illness, Herbert, you know.'

Herbert acknowledged that, to a certain extent, his father's illness was a reason—only to a certain extent. It would be worse than useless to think of waiting till his father's health should be altogether strong. Just for the present, till Mr. Prendergast should have gone, and perhaps for a fortnight longer, it might be well to wait. But after that—and then he pressed very closely the hand which rested on his arm. And so the matter was discussed between them with language and arguments which were by no means original.

At the gate, just as Herbert was about to remount his horse, they were encountered by a sight which for years past had not been uncommon in the south of Ireland, but which had become frightfully common during the last two or three months. A woman was standing there, of whom you could hardly say that she was clothed, though she was involved in a mass of rags which covered her nakedness. Her head was all uncovered, and her wild black hair was streaming round her face. Behind her back hung two children enveloped among the rags in some mysterious way; and round about her on the road stood three others, of whom the two younger were almost absolutely naked. The eldest of the five was not above seven. They all had the same wild black eyes, and wild elfish straggling locks; but neither the mother nor the children were comely. She was short and broad in the shoulders, though wretchedly thin; her bare legs seemed to be of nearly the same thickness up to the knee, and the naked limbs of the children were like yellow sticks. It is strange how various are the kinds of physical development among the Celtic peasantry in Ireland. In many places they are singularly beautiful, especially as children; and even after labour and sickness shall have told on them as labour and sickness will tell, they still retain a certain softness and grace which is very nearly akin to beauty.

But then again in a neighbouring district they will be found to be squat, uncouth, and in no way attractive to the eye. The tint of the complexion, the nature of the hair, the colour of the eyes, shall be the same. But in one place it will seem as though noble blood had produced delicate limbs and elegant stature, whereas in the other a want of noble blood had produced the reverse. The peasants of Clare, Limerick, and Tipperary are, in this way, much more comely than those of Cork and Kerry.

When Herbert and Clara reached the gate they found this mother with her five children crouching at the ditch-side, although it was still mid-winter. They had seen him enter the demesne, and were now waiting with the patience of poverty for his return.

‘An’ the holy Virgin guide an’ save you, my lady,’ said the woman, almost frightening Clara by the sudden way in which she came forward, ‘an’ you too, Misther Herbert; and for the love of heaven do something for a poor crathur whose five starving childher have not had wholesome food within their lips for the last week past.’

Clara looked at them piteously and put her hand towards her pocket. Her purse was never well furnished, and now in these bad days was usually empty. At the present moment it was

wholly so. 'I have nothing to give her; not a penny,' she said, whispering to her lover.

But Herbert had learned deep lessons of political economy, and was by no means disposed to give promiscuous charity on the road-side. 'What is your name,' said he; 'and from where do you come?'

'Shure, an' it's yer honor knows me well enough; and her ladyship too; may the heavens be her bed. And don't I come from Clady; that is two long miles the fur side of it? And my name is Bridget Sheehy. Shure, an' yer ladyship remembers me at Clady the first day ye war over there about the biler.'

Clara looked at her, and thought that she did remember her, but she said nothing. 'And who is your husband?' said Herbert.

'Murty Brien, plaze yer honor;' and the woman ducked a curtsey with the heavy load of two children on her back. It must be understood that among the poorer classes in the south and west of Ireland it is almost rare for a married woman to call herself or to be called by her husband's name.

'And is he not at work?'

'Shure, an' he is, yer honor—down beyant Kinsale by the say. But what's four shilling a week for a man's diet, let alone a woman and five bairns?'

‘And so he has deserted you?’

‘No, yer honor; he’s not dasarted me thin. He’s a good man and a kind, av’ he had the mains. But we’ve a cabin up here, on her ladyship’s ground that is; and he has sent me up among my own people, hoping that times would come round; but faix, yer honor, I’m thinking that they’ll never come round, no more.’

‘And what do you want now, Bridget?’

‘What is it I’m wanting? just a thrifle of money then to get a sup of milk for thim five childher as is starving and dying for the want of it.’ And she pointed to the wretched, naked brood around her with a gesture which in spite of her ugliness had in it something of tragic grandeur.

‘But you know that we will not give money. They will take you in at the poorhouse at Kanturk.’

‘Is it the poorhouse, yer honor?’

‘Or, if you get a ticket from your priest they will give you meal twice a week at Clady. You know that. Why do you not go to Father Connellan?’

‘Is it the mail? An’ shure an’ haven’t I had it, the last month past; nothin’ else; not a taste of a piaty or a dhrop of milk for nigh a month, and now look at the childher. Look at them, my lady. They are dyin’ by the very road-side.

And she undid the bundle at her back, and laying the two babes down on the road showed that the elder of them was in truth in a fearful state. It was a child nearly two years of age, but its little legs seemed to have withered away; its cheeks were wan, and yellow and sunken, and the two teeth which it had already cut were seen with terrible plainness through its emaciated lips. Its head and forehead were covered with sores; and then the mother, moving aside the rags, showed that its back and legs were in the same state. 'Look to that,' she said, almost with scorn. 'That's what the mail has done—my black curses be upon it, and the day that it first come nigh the country.' And then again she covered the child and began to resume her load.

'Do give her something, Herbert, pray do,' said Clara, with her whole face suffused with tears.

'You know that we cannot give away money,' said Herbert, arguing with Bridget Sheehy, and not answering Clara at the moment. 'You understand enough of what is being done to know that. Why do you not go into the Union?'

'Shure thin an' I'll jist tramp on as fur as Hap House, I and my childher; that is av' they do not die by the road-side. Come on, bairns. Mr. Owen won't be afther sending me to the Kanturk union when I tell him that I've travelled all

thim miles to get a dhrink of milk for a sick babe; more by token when I tells him also that I'm one of the Desmond tinantry. It's he that loves the Desmonds, Lady Clara,—loves them as his own heart's blood. And it's I that wish him geod luck with his love, in spite of all that's come and gone yet. Come on, bairns, come along; we have seven weary miles to walk.' And then, having rearranged her burden on her back, she prepared again to start.

Herbert Fitzgerald, from the first moment of his interrogating the woman, had of course known that he would give her somewhat. In spite of all his political economy, there were but few days in which he did not empty his pocket of his loose silver, with these culpable deviations from his theoretical philosophy. But yet he felt that it was his duty to insist on his rules, as far as his heart would allow him to do so. It was a settled thing at their relief committee that there should be no giving away of money to chance applicants for alms. What money each had to bestow would go twice further by being brought to the general fund—by being expended with forethought and discrimination. This was the system which all attempted, which all resolved to adopt who were then living in the south of Ireland. But the system was impracticable, for it required frames of iron and hearts of adamant.

It was impossible not to waste money in almsgiving.

‘Oh, Herbert!’ said Clara, imploringly, as the woman prepared to start.

‘Bridget, come here,’ said Herbert, and he spoke very seriously, for the woman’s allusion to Owen Fitzgerald had driven a cloud across his brow. ‘Your child is very ill, and therefore I will give you something to help you,’ and he gave her a shilling and two sixpences.

‘May the God in heaven bless you thin, and make you happy, whoever wins the bright darling by your side; and may the good days come back to yer house and all that belongs to it. May yer wife clave to you all her days, and be a good mother to your childher.’ And she would have gone on further with her blessing had not he interrupted her.

‘Go on now, my good woman,’ said he, ‘and take your children where they may be warm. If you will be advised by me, you will go to the Union at Kanturk.’ And so the woman passed on still blessing them. Very shortly after this none of them required pressing to go to the workhouse. Every building that could be arranged for the purpose was filled to overflowing as soon as it was ready. But the worst of the famine had not come upon them as yet. And then Herbert rode back to Castle Richmond.

CHAPTER III.

FATHER BARNEY.

MICK O'DWYER'S public-house at Kanturk was by no means so pretentious an establishment as that kept by his brother in South Main Street, Cork, but it was on the whole much less nasty. It was a drinking-shop and a public car office, and such places in Ireland are seldom very nice; but there was no attempt at hotel grandeur, and the little room in which the family lived behind the bar was never invaded by customers.

On one evening just at this time—at the time, that is, with which we have been lately concerned—three persons were sitting in this room over a cup of tea. There was a gentleman, middle-aged, but none the worse on that account, who has already been introduced in these pages as Father Bernard M'Carthy. He was the parish priest of Drumbarrow; and as his parish comprised a portion of the town of Kanturk, he lived, not exactly in the town, but within a mile

of it. His sister had married Mr. O'Dwyer of South Main Street, and therefore he was quite at home in the little back parlour of Mick O'Dwyer's house in Kanturk. Indeed Father Bernard was a man who made himself at home in the houses of most of his parishioners,—and of some who were not his parishioners.

His companions on the present occasion were two ladies who seemed to be emulous in supplying his wants. The younger and more attractive of the two was also an old friend of ours, being no other than Fanny O'Dwyer from South Main Street. Actuated, doubtless, by some important motive she had left her bar at home for one night, having come down to Kanturk by her father's car, with the intention of returning by it in the morning. She was seated as a guest here on the corner of the sofa near the fire, but nevertheless she was neither too proud nor too strange in her position to administer as best she might to the comfort of her uncle.

The other lady was Mistress O'Dwyer, the lady of the mansion. She was fat, very; by no means fair, and perhaps something over forty. But nevertheless there were those who thought that she had her charms. A better hand at curing a side of bacon there was not in the county Cork, nor a woman who was more knowing in keeping a house straight and snug over

her husband's head. That she had been worth more than a fortune to Mick O'Dwyer was admitted by all in Kanturk; for it was known to all that Mick O'Dwyer was not himself a good hand at keeping a house straight and snug.

'Another cup of tay, Father Bernard,' said this lady. 'It'll be more to your liking now than the first, you'll find.' Father Barney, perfectly reliant on her word, handed in his cup.

'And the muffin is quite hot,' said Fanny, stooping down to a tray which stood before the peat fire, holding the muffin dish. 'But perhaps you'd like a morsel of buttered toast; say the word, uncle, and I'll make it in a brace of seconds.'

'In course she will,' said Mrs. O'Dwyer: 'and happy too, av you'll only say that you have a fancy, Father Bernard.'

But Father Bernard would not own to any such fancy. The muffin, he said, was quite to his liking, and so was the tea; and from the manner in which he disposed of these delicacies, even Mrs. Townsend might have admitted that this assertion was true, though she was wont to express her belief that nothing but lies could, by any possibility, fall from his mouth.

'And they have been staying with you now for some weeks, haven't they?' said Father Barney.

‘Off and on,’ said Fanny.

‘But there’s one of them mostly there, isn’t he?’ added the priest.

‘The two of them is mostly there, just now. Sometimes one goes away for a day or two, and sometimes the other.’

‘And they have no business which keeps them in Cork?’ continued the priest, who seemed to be very curious on the matter.

‘Well, they do have business, I suppose,’ said Fanny, ‘but av so I never sees it.’ Fanny O’Dwyer had a great respect for her uncle, seeing that he filled an exalted position, and was a connexion of whom she could be justly proud; but, though she had now come down to Kanturk with the view of having a good talk with her aunt and uncle about the Molletts, she would only tell as much as she liked to tell, even to the parish priest of Drumbarrow. And we may as well explain here that Fanny had now permanently made up her mind to reject the suit of Mr. Abraham Mollett. As she had allowed herself to see more and more of the little domestic ways of that gentleman, and to become intimate with him as a girl should become with the man she intends to marry, she had gradually learned to think that he hardly came up to her beau ideal of a lover. That he was crafty and false did not perhaps offend her as it should have

done. Dear Fanny, excellent and gracious as she was, could herself be crafty on occasions. He drank too, but that came in the way of her profession. It is hard, perhaps, for a bar-maid to feel much severity against that offence. But in addition to this Aby was selfish and cruel and insolent, and seldom altogether good tempered. He was bad to his father, and bad to those below him whom he employed. Old Mollett would give away his sixpences with a fairly liberal hand, unless when he was exasperated by drink and fatigue. But Aby seldom gave away a penny. Fanny had sharp eyes, and soon felt that her English lover was not a man to be loved, though he had two rings, a gold chain, and half a dozen fine waistcoats.

And then another offence had come to light in which the Molletts were both concerned. Since their arrival in South Main Street they had been excellent customers—indeed quite a godsend, in this light, to Fanny, who had her own peculiar profit out of such house-customers as they were. They had paid their money like true Britons,—not regularly indeed, for regularity had not been desired, but by a five pound now, and another in a day or two, just as they were wanted. Nothing indeed could be better than this, for bills so paid are seldom rigidly scrutinized. But of late, within the last week, Fanny's requests for funds

had not been so promptly met, and only on the day before her visit to Kanturk she had been forced to get her father to take a bill from Mr. Mollett senior for 20*l.* at two months' date. This was a great come-down, as both Fanny and her father felt, and they had begun to think that it might be well to bring their connexion with the Molletts to a close. What if an end had come to the money of these people, and their bills should be dishonoured when due? It was all very well for a man to have claims against Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, but Fanny O'Dwyer had already learnt that nothing goes so far in this world as ready cash.

'They do have business, I suppose,' said Fanny.

'It won't be worth much, I'm thinking,' said Mrs. O'Dwyer, 'when they can't pay their weekly bills at a house of public entertainment, without flying their names at two months' date.'

Mrs. O'Dwyer hated any such payments herself, and looked on them as certain signs of immorality. That every man should take his drop of drink, consume it noiselessly, and pay for it immediately—that was her idea of propriety in its highest form.

'And they've been down here three or four times, each of them,' said Father Barney, thinking deeply on the subject.

‘I believe they have,’ said Fanny. ‘But of course I don’t know much of where they’ve been to.’

Father Barney knew very well that his dear niece had been on much more intimate terms with her guest than she pretended. The rumours had reached his ears some time since that the younger of the two strangers in South Main Street was making himself agreeable to the heiress of the hotel, and he had intended to come down upon her with all the might of an uncle, and, if necessary, with all the authority of the Church. But now that Fanny had discarded her lover, he wisely felt that it would be well for him to know nothing about it. Both uncles and priests may know too much—very foolishly.

‘I have seen them here myself,’ said he, ‘and they have both been up at Castle Richmond.’

‘They do say as poor Sir Thomas is in a bad way,’ said Mrs. O’Dwyer, shaking her head piteously.

‘And yet he sees these men,’ said Father Barney. ‘I know that for certain. He has seen them, though he will rarely see anybody now-a-days.’

‘Young Mr. Herbert is a-doing most of the business up about the place,’ said Mrs. O’Dwyer. ‘And people do say as how he is going to make a match of it with Lady Clara Desmond. And

it's the lucky girl she'll be, for he's a nice young fellow entirely.'

'Not half equal to her other Joe, Mr. Owen that is,' said Fanny.

'Well, I don't know that, my dear. Such a house and property as Castle Richmond is not likely to go a-begging among the young women. And then Mr. Herbert is not so rampageous like as him of Hap-house, by all accounts.'

But Father Barney still kept to his subject. 'And they are both at your place at the present moment, eh, Fanny?'

'They was to dine there, after I left.'

'And the old man said he'd be down here again next Thursday,' continued the priest. 'I heard that for certain. I'll tell you what it is; they're not after any good here. They are Protestants, aint they?'

'Oh, black Protestants,' said Mrs. O'Dwyer. 'But you are not taking your tay, Father Bernard,' and she again filled his cup for him.

'If you'll take my advice, Fanny, you'll give them nothing more without seeing their money. They'll come to no good here, I'm sure of that. They're afther some mischief with that poor old gentleman at Castle Richmond, and it's my belief the police will have them before they've done.'

'Like enough,' said Mrs. O'Dwyer.

'They may have them to-morrow, for what I

care,' said Fanny, who could not help feeling that Aby Mollett had at one time been not altogether left without hope as her suitor.

'But you wouldn't like anything like that to happen in your father's house,' said Father Barney.

'Bringing trouble and disgrace on an honest name,' said Mrs. O'Dwyer.

'There'd be no disgrace as I knows of,' said Fanny, stoutly. 'Father makes his money by the public, and in course he takes in any that comes the way with money in their pockets to pay the shot.'

'But these Molletts ain't got the money to pay the shot,' said Mrs. O'Dwyer, caustically. 'You've about sucked 'em dhray, I'm thinking, and they owes you more now than you're like to get from 'em.'

'I suppose father 'll have to take that bill up,' said Fanny, assenting. And so it was settled down there among them that the Molletts were to have the cold shoulder, and that they should in fact be turned out of the Kanturk Hotel as quickly as this could be done. 'Better a small loss at first, than a big one at last,' said Mrs. O'Dwyer, with much wisdom. 'They'll come to mischief down here, as sure as my name's M'Carthy,' said the priest. 'And I'd be sorry your father should be mixed up in it.'

And then by degrees the conversation was changed, but not till the tea things had been taken away, and a square small bottle of very particular whisky put on the table in its place. And the sugar also was brought, and boiling water in an immense jug, as though Father Barney were going to make a deep potation indeed, and a lemon in a wine glass; and then the priest was invited, with much hospitality, to make himself comfortable. Nor did the luxuries prepared for him end here; but Fanny, the pretty Fan herself, filled a pipe for him, and pretended that she would light it, for such priests are merry enough sometimes, and can joke as well as other men with their pretty nieces.

‘But you’re not mixing your punch, Father Bernard,’ said Mrs. O’Dwyer, with a plaintive melancholy voice, ‘and the wather getting cowl’d and all! Faix then, Father Bernard, I’ll mix it for ye, so I will.’ And so she did, and well she knew how. And then she made another for herself and her niece, urging that ‘a thimbleful would do Fanny all the good in life afther her ride acress them cowl’d mountains,’ and the priest looked on assenting, blowing the comfortable streams of smoke from his nostrils.

‘And so, Father Bernard, you and Parson Townsend is to meet again to-morrow at Gort-naclough.’ Whereupon Father Bernard owned

that such was the case, with a nod, not caring to disturb the pipe which lay comfortably on his lower lip.

‘Well, well; only to think on it,’ continued Mrs. O’Dwyer. ‘That the same room should hould the two of ye.’ And she lifted up her hands and shook her head.

‘It houlds us both very comfortable, I can assure you, Mrs. O’Dwyer.’

‘And he ain’t rampageous and highy-tighty? He don’t give hisself no airs?’

‘Well, no; nothing in particular. Why should the man be such a fool as that?’

‘Why, in course? But they are such fools, Father Bernard. They does think theyselves such grand folks. Now don’t they? I’d give a dandy of punch all round to the company just to hear you put him down once; I would. But he isn’t upsetting at all, then?’

‘Not the last time we met, he wasn’t; and I don’t think he intends it. Things have come to that now that the parsons know where they are and what they have to look to. They’re getting a lesson they’ll not forget in a hurry. Where are their rent charges to come from—can you tell me that, Mrs. O’Dwyer?’

Mrs. O’Dwyer could not, but she remarked that pride would always have a fall. ‘And there’s no pride like Protesthant pride,’ said Fanny. ‘It is

so upsetting, I can't abide it.' All which tended to show that she had quite given up her Protestant lover.

And is it getthing worse than iver with the poor crathurs?' said Mrs. O'Dwyer, referring, not to the Protestants, but to the victims of the famine.

'Indeed it's getting no betther,' said the priest, 'and I'm fearing it will be worse before it is over. I haven't married one couple in Drumbarrow since November last.'

'And that's a heavy sign, Father Bernard.'

'The surest sign in the world that they have no money among them at all, at all. And it is bad with thim, Mrs. O'Dwyer,—very bad, very bad indeed.'

'Glory be to God, the poor cratures!' said the soft-hearted lady. 'It isn't much the like of us have to give away, Father Bernard; I needn't be telling you that. But we'll help, you know,—we'll help.'

'And so will father, uncle Bernard. If you're so bad off about here I know he'll give you a thrifle for the asking.' In a short time, however, it came to pass that those in the cities could spare no aid to the country. Indeed it may be a question whether the city poverty was not the harder of the two.

'God bless you both—you've soft hearts, I know.' And Father Barney put his punch to

his lips. 'Whatever you can do for me shall not be thrown away. And I'll tell you what, Mrs. O'Dwyer, it does behove us all to put our best foot out now. We will not let them say that the Papists would do nothing for their own poor.'

'Deed then an' they'll say anything of us, Father Bernard. There's nothing too hot or too heavy for them.'

'At any rate let us not deserve it, Mrs. O'Dwyer. There will be a lot of them at Gort-naclough to-morrow, and I shall tell them that we, on our side, won't be wanting. To give them their due, I must say that they are working well. That young Herbert Fitzgerald's a trump, whether he's Protestant or Catholic.'

'An' they do say he's a strong bearing towards the ould religion,' said Mrs. O'Dwyer. 'God bless his sweet young face av' he'd come back to us. That's what I say.'

'God bless his face any way, say I,' said Father Barney, with a wider philanthropy. 'He is doing his best for the people, and the time has come now when we must hang together, if it be any way possible.' And with this the priest finished his pipe, and wishing the ladies good night, walked away to his own house.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RELIEF COMMITTEE.

At this time the famine was beginning to be systematised. The sternest among landlords and masters were driven to acknowledge that the people had not got food or the means of earning it. The people themselves were learning that a great national calamity had happened, and that the work was God's work ; and the Government had fully recognized the necessity of taking the whole matter into its own hands. They were responsible for the preservation of the people, and they acknowledged their responsibility.

And then two great rules seemed to get themselves laid down—not by general consent, for there were many who greatly contested their wisdom—but by some force strong enough to make itself dominant. The first was, that the food to be provided should be earned and not given away. And the second was, that the providing of that food should be left to private com-

petition, and not in in any way be undertaken by the Government. I make bold to say that both these rules were wise and good.

But how should the people work? That Government should supply the wages was of course an understood necessity; and it was also necessary that on all such work the amount of wages should be regulated by the price at which provisions might fix themselves. These points produced questions which were hotly debated by the Relief Committees of the different districts; but at last it got itself decided, again by the hands of Government, that all hills along the country roads should be cut away, and that the people should be employed on this work. They were so employed,—very little to the advantage of the roads for that or some following years.

‘So you have begun, my men,’ said Herbert to a gang of labourers whom he found collected at a certain point on Ballydahan Hill, which lay on his road from Castle Richmond to Gortnaclough. In saying this he had certainly paid them an unmerited compliment, for they had hitherto begun nothing. Some thirty or forty wretched-looking men were clustered together in the dirt and slop and mud, on the brow of the hill, armed with such various tools as each was able to find—with tools, for the most part, which would go but a little way in making Ballydahan Hill level or

accessible. This question of tools also came to a sort of understood settlement before long ; and within three months of the time of which I am writing legions of wheelbarrows were to be seen lying near every hill ; wheelbarrows in hundreds and thousands. The fate of those myriads of wheelbarrows has always been a mystery to me.

‘So you have begun, my men,’ said Herbert, addressing them in a kindly voice. There was a couple of gangsmen with them, men a little above the others in appearance, but apparently incapable of commencing the work in hand, for they also were standing idle, leaning against a bit of wooden paling. It had, however, been decided that the works at Ballydahan hill should begin on this day, and there were the men assembled. One fact admitted of no doubt, namely, this, that the wages would begin from this day.

And then the men came and clustered round Herbert’s horse. They were wretched-looking creatures, half-clad, discontented, with hungry eyes, each having at his heart’s core a deep sense of injustice done personally upon him. They hated this work of cutting hills from the commencement to the end,—hated it, though it was to bring them wages and save them and theirs from actual famine and death. They had not been accustomed to the discomfort of being taken far from their homes to their daily work. Very

many of them had never worked regularly for wages, day after day, and week after week. Up to this time such was not the habit of Irish cottiers: They held their own land, and laboured there for a spell; and then they would work for a spell, as men do in England, taking wages; and then they would be idle for a spell. It was not exactly a profitable mode of life, but it had its comforts; and now these unfortunates who felt themselves to be driven forth like cattle in droves for the first time, suffered the full wretchedness of their position. They were not rough and unruly, or inclined to be troublesome and perhaps violent, as men similarly circumstanced so often are in England;—as Irishmen are when collected in gangs out of Ireland. They had no aptitudes for such roughness, and no spirits for such violence. But they were melancholy, given to complaint, apathetic, and utterly without interest in that they were doing.

‘Yz, yer honer,’ said one man who was standing, shaking himself, with his hands enveloped in the rags of his pockets. He had on no coat, and the keen north wind seemed to be blowing through his bones; cold, however, as he was, he would do nothing towards warming himself, unless that occasional shake can be considered as a doing of something. ‘Yz, yer honer; we’ve begun thin since before daylight this blessed morning.’

It was now eleven o'clock, and a pick-axe had not been put into the ground, nor the work marked.

'Been here before daylight!' said Herbert. 'And has there been nobody to set you to work?'

'Divil a sowl, yer honer,' said another, who was sitting on a hedge-bank leaning with both his hands on a hoe, which he held between his legs, 'barring Thady Molloy and Shawn Brady; they two do be over us, but they knows nothin' o' such jobs as this.'

Thady Molloy and Shawn Brady had with the others moved up so as to be close to Herbert's horse, but they said not a word towards vindicating their own fitness for command.

'And it's mortial cowl'd standing here thin,' said another, 'without a bit to ate or a sup to dhrink since last night, and then only a lump of the yally mail.' And the speaker moved about on his toes and heels, desirous of keeping his blood in circulation with the smallest possible amount of trouble.

'I'm telling the boys it's home we'd betther be going,' said a fourth.

'And lose the tizzy they've promised us,' said he of the hoe.

'Sorrow a tizzy they'll pay any of yez for standing here all day,' said an ill-looking little wretch of a fellow, with a black muzzle and a

squinting eye; 'ye may all die in the road first.' And the man turned away among the crowd, as an Irishman does who has made his speech and does not want to be answered.

'You need have no fear about that, my men,' said Herbert. 'Whether you be put to work or no you'll receive your wages; you may take my word for that.'

'I've been telling 'em that for the last half hour,' said the man with the hoe, now rising to his feet. 'Shure an' didn't Mr. Somers be telling us that we'd have saxpence each day as long we war here afore daylight?' said I, yer honer; 'an' shure an' wasn't it black night when we war here this blessed morning, and devil a fear of the tizzy?' said I. But it's mortal cowld, an' it'd be asier for uz to be doing a spell of work than crouching about on our hunkers down on the wet ground.'

All this was true. It had been specially enjoined upon them to be early at their work. An Irishman as a rule will not come regularly to his task. It is a very difficult thing to secure his services every morning at six o'clock; but make a special point,—tell him that you want him very early, and he will come to you in the middle of the night. Breakfast every morning punctually at eight o'clock is almost impossible in Ireland; but if you want one special breakfast,

so that you may start by a train at 4 A.M., you are sure to be served. No irregular effort is distasteful to an Irishman of the lower classes, not if it entails on him the loss of a day's food and the loss of a night's rest; the actual pleasure of the irregularity repays him for all this, and he never tells you that this or that is not his work. He prefers work that is not his own. Your coachman will have no objection to turn the mangle, but heaven and earth put together won't persuade him to take the horses out to exercise every morning at the same hour. These men had been told to come early, and they had been there on the road-side since five o'clock. It was not surprising that they were cold and hungry, listless and unhappy.

And then, as young Fitzgerald was questioning the so-named gangmen as to the instructions they had received, a jaunting car came up to the foot of the hill. 'We war to wait for the ongineer,' Shawn Brady had said, 'an' shure an' we have waited.' 'An' here's one of Misther Carroll's cars from Mallow,' said Thady Molloy, 'and that's the ongineer hisself.' Thady Molloy was right; this was the engineer himself, who had now arrived from Mallow. From this time forth, and for the next twelve months, the country was full of engineers, or of men who were so called. I do not say this in disparagement; but the en-

gineers were like the yellow meal. When there is an immense demand, and that a suddenly immense demand, for any article, it is seldom easy to get it very good. In those days men became engineers with a short amount of apprenticeship, but, as a rule, they did not do their work badly. In such days as those, men, if they be men at all, will put their shoulders to the wheel.

The engineer was driven up to where they were standing, and he jumped off the car among the men who were to work under him with rather a pretentious air. He had not observed, or probably had not known, Herbert Fitzgerald. He was a very young fellow, still under one-and-twenty, beardless, light-haired, blue-eyed, and fresh from England. 'And what hill is this?' said he to the driver.

'Ballydahan, shure, yer honer. That last war Connick-a-coppul, and that other, the big un intirely, where the crass road takes away to Buttevant, that was Glounthauneroughtymore. Faix and that's been the murthering hill for cattle since first I knew it. Bedad yer honer'll make it smooth as a bowling-green.'

'Ballydahan,' said the young man, taking a paper out of his pocket and looking up the names in his list, 'I've got it. There should be thirty-seven of them here.'

'Shure an' here we are these siven hours,' said

our friend of the hoe, 'and mighty cowl'd we are.'

'Thady Molloy and Shawn Brady,' called out the engineer, managing thoroughly to Anglicise the pronunciation of the names, though they were not Celtically composite to any great degree.

'Yez, we's here,' said Thady, coming forward. And then Herbert came up and introduced himself, and the young engineer took off his hat. 'I came away from Mallow before eight,' said he apologetically; 'but I have four of these places to look after, and when one gets to one of them it is impossible to get away again. There was one place where I was kept two hours before I could get one of the men to understand what they were to do. What is it you call that big hill?'

'GlounthauneroUGHTYmore, yer honer,' said the driver, to whom the name was as easy and familiar as his own.

'And you are going to set these men to work now?' said Herbert.

'Well, I don't suppose they'll do much to day, Mr. Fitzgerald. But I must try and explain to the head men how they are to begin. They have none of them any tools you see.' And then he called out again. 'Thady Molloy and Shawn Brady.'

'We's here,' said Thady again; 'we did not exactly know whether yer honer'd be afther begin-

ning at the top or the botthom. That's all that war staying us.'

'Never fear,' said Shawn, 'but we'll have ould Ballydahan level in less than no time. We're the boys that can do it, fair and aisy.'

It appeared to Herbert that the young engineer seemed to be rather bewildered by the job of work before him, and therefore he rode on, not stopping to embarrass him by any inspection of his work. In process of time no doubt so much of the top of Ballydahan hill was carried to the bottom as made the whole road altogether impassable for many months. But the great object was gained; the men were fed, and were not fed by charity. What did it matter, that the springs of every conveyance in the county Cork were shattered by the process, and that the works resulted in myriads of wheelbarrows?

And then, as he rode on towards Gortnaclough, Herbert was overtaken by his friend the parson, who was also going to the meeting of the relief committee. 'You have not seen the men at Ballydahan hill, have you?' said Herbert.

Mr. Townsend explained that he had not seen them. His road had struck on to that on which they now were not far from the top of the hill. 'But I knew they were to be there this morning,' said Mr. Townsend.

'They have sent quite a lad of a fellow to show

them how to work,' said Herbert. 'I fear we shall all come to grief with these road-cuttings.'

'For heaven's sake don't say that at the meeting,' said Mr. Townsend, 'or you'll be playing the priests' game out and out. Father Barney has done all in his power to prevent the works.'

'But what if Father Barney be right?' said Herbert.

'But he's not right,' said the parson energetically. 'He's altogether wrong. I never knew one of them right in my life yet in anything. How can they be right?'

'But I think you are mixing up road-making and Church doctrine, Mr. Townsend.'

'I hope I may never be in danger of mixing up God and the devil. You cannot touch pitch and not be defiled. Remember that, Herbert Fitzgerald.'

'I will remember nothing of the kind,' said Herbert. 'Am I to set myself up as a judge and say that this is pitch and that is pitch? Do you remember St. Peter on the housetop? Was not he afraid of what was unclean?'

'The meaning of that was that he was to convert the Gentiles, and not give way to their errors. He was to contend with them and not give way an inch till he had driven them from their idolatry.' Mr. Townsend had been specially primed by his wife that morning with vigorous

hostility against Father Barney, and was grieved to his heart at finding that his young friend was prepared to take the priest's part in anything. In this matter of the roads Mr. Townsend was doubtless right, but hardly on the score of the arguments assigned by him.

'I don't mean to say that there should be no road-making,' said Herbert, after a pause. 'The general opinion seems to be that we can't do better. I only say that we shall come to grief about it. Those poor fellows there have as much idea of cutting down a hill as I have; and it seems to me that the young lad whom I left with them has not much more.'

'They'll learn all in good time.'

'Let us hope it will be in good time.'

'If we once let them have the idea that we are to feed them in idleness,' said Mr. Townsend, 'they will want to go on for ever in the same way. And then, when they receive such immense sums in money wages, the priests will be sure to get their share. If the matter had been left to me, I would have paid the men in meal. I would never have given them money. They should have worked and got their food. The priest will get a penny out of every shilling; you'll see else.' And so the matter was discussed between them as they went along to Gortnacloagh.

When they reached the room in which the committee was held they found Mr. Somers already in the chair. Priest McCarthy was there also, with his coadjutor, the Rev. Columb Creagh—Father Columb as he was always called; and there was a Mr. O'Leary from Boherbuy, one of the middlemen as they were formerly named,—though by the way I never knew that word to be current in Ireland; it is familiar to all, and was I suppose common some few years since, but I never heard the peasants calling such persons by that title. He was one of those with whom the present times were likely to go very hard. He was not a bad man, unless in so far as this, that he had no idea of owing any duty to others beyond himself and his family. His doctrine at present amounted to this, that if you left the people alone and gave them no false hopes, they would contrive to live somehow. He believed in a good deal, but he had no belief whatever in starvation,—none as yet. It was probable enough that some belief in this might come to him now before long. There were also one or two others; men who had some stake in the country, but men who hadn't a tithe of the interest possessed by Sir Thomas Fitzgerald.

Mr. Townsend again went through the ceremony of shaking hands with his reverend brethren, and, on this occasion, did not seem to be much

the worse for it. Indeed, in looking at the two men cursorily a stranger might have said that the condescension was all on the other side. Mr. M'Carthy was dressed quite smartly. His black clothes were spruce and glossy; his gloves, of which he still kept on one and showed the other, were quite new; he was clean shaven, and altogether he had a shiny, bright, ebon appearance about him that quite did a credit to his side of the church. But our friend the parson was discreditably shabby. His clothes were all brown, his white neck-tie could hardly have been clean during the last forty-eight hours, and was tied in a knot, which had worked itself nearly round to his ear as he had sat sideways on the car; his boots were ugly and badly brushed, and his hat was very little better than some of those worn by the workmen—so called—at Ballydahan hill. But, nevertheless, on looking accurately into the faces of both, one might see which man was the better nurtured and the better born. That operation with the sow's ear is, one may say, seldom successful with the first generation.

'A beautiful morning, this,' said the coadjutor, addressing Herbert Fitzgerald, with a very mild voice and an unutterable look of friendship; as though he might have said, 'Here we are in a boat together, and of course we are all very fond of each other.' To tell the truth, Father Columb

was not a nice-looking young man. He was red-haired, slightly marked with the small-pox, and had a low forehead and cunning eyes.

‘Yes, it is, a nice morning,’ said Herbert. ‘We don’t expect anybody else here, do we, Somers?’

‘At any rate we won’t wait,’ said Somers. So he sat down in the arm-chair, and they all went to work.

‘I am afraid, Mr. Somers,’ said Mr. M’Carthy from the other end of the table, where he had constituted himself a sort of deputy chairman, ‘I am afraid we are going on a wrong tack.’ The priest had shuffled away his chair as he began to speak, and was now standing with his hands upon the table. It is singular how strong a propensity some men have to get upon their legs in this way.

‘How so,’ Mr. M’Carthy?’ said Somers. ‘But shan’t we be all more comfortable if we keep our chairs? There’ll be less ceremony, won’t there, Mr. Townsend?’

‘Oh! certainly,’ said Townsend.

‘Less liable to interruption, perhaps, on our legs,’ said Father Columb, smiling blandly.

But Mr. M’Carthy was far too wise to fight the question, so he sat down. ‘Just as you like,’ said he; ‘I can talk any way, sitting or standing, walking or riding; it’s all one to me. But I’ll

tell you how we are on the wrong tack. We shall never get these men to work in gangs on the road. Never. They have not been accustomed to be driven like droves of sheep.'

'But droves of sheep don't work on the road,' said Mr. Townsend.'

'I know that, Mr. Townsend,' continued Mr. M'Carthy. 'I am quite well aware of that. But droves of sheep are driven, and these men won't bear it.'

'Deed an' they won't,' said Father Columb, having altogether laid aside his bland smile now that the time had come, as he thought, to speak up for the people. 'They may bear it in England, but they won't here.' And the sternness of his eye was almost invincible.

'If they are so foolish, they must be taught better manners,' said Mr. Townsend. 'But you'll find they'll work just as other men do—look at the navvies.'

'And look at the navvies' wages,' said Father Columb.

'Besides the navvies only go if they like it,' said the parish priest.

'And these men need not go unless they like it,' said Mr. Somers. 'Only with this proviso, that if they cannot manage for themselves they must fall into our way of managing for them.'

'What I say, is this,' said Mr. O'Leary. 'Let

'em manage for 'emselves. God bless my soul! Why we shall be skinned alive if we have to pay all this money back to Government. If Government chooses to squander thousands in this way, Government should bear the brunt. That's what I say.' Eventually, Government, that is the whole nation, did bear the brunt. But it would not have been very wise to promise this at the time.

'But we need hardly debate all that at the present moment,' said Mr. Somers. 'That matter of the roads has already been decided for us, and we can't alter it if we would.'

'Then we may as well shut up shop,' said Mr. O'Leary.

'It's all very aisy to talk in that way,' said Father Columb; 'but the Government, as you call it, can't make men work. It can't force eight millions of the finest pisantry on God's earth——,' and Father Columb was, by degrees, pushing away the seat from under him, when he was cruelly and ruthlessly stopped by his own parish priest.

'I beg your pardon for a moment, Oreagh,' said he; 'but perhaps we are getting a little out of the track. What Mr. Somers says is very true. If these men won't work on the road—and I don't think they will—the responsibility is not on us. That matter has been decided for us.'

‘Men will sooner work anywhere than starve,’ said Mr. Townsend.

‘Some men will,’ said Father Columb, with a great deal of meaning in his tone. What he intended to convey was this—that Protestants, no doubt, would do so, under the dominion of the flesh; but that Roman Catholics, being under the dominion of the Spirit, would perish first.

‘At any rate we must try,’ said Father M‘Carthy.

‘Exactly,’ said Mr. Somers; ‘and what we have now to do is to see how we may best enable these workers to live on their wages, and how those others are to live, who, when all is done, will get no wages.’

‘I think we had better turn shopkeepers ourselves, and open stores for them everywhere,’ said Herbert. ‘That is what we are doing already at Berryhill.’

‘And import our own corn,’ said the parson.

‘And where are we to get the money?’ said the priest.

‘And why are we to ruin the merchants?’ said O‘Leary, whose brother was in the flour-trade, in Cork.

‘And shut up all the small shopkeepers,’ said Father Columb, whose mother was established in that line in the neighbourhood of Castleisland.

‘We could not do it,’ said Somers. ‘The

demand upon us would be so great, that we should certainly break down. And then where would we be?’

‘But for a time, Somers,’ pleaded Herbert.

‘For a time we may do something in that way, till other means present themselves. But we must refuse all out-door relief. They who cannot or do not bring money must go into the workhouses.’

‘You will not get houses in county Cork sufficient to hold them,’ said Father Bernard. And so the debate went on, not altogether without some sparks of wisdom, with many sparks also of eager benevolence, and some few passing clouds of fuliginous self-interest. And then lists were produced, with the names on them of all who were supposed to be in want—which were about to become, before long, lists of the whole population of the country. And at last it was decided among them, that in their district nothing should be absolutely given away, except to old women and widows,—which kindhearted clause was speedily neutralised by women becoming widows while their husbands were still living; and it was decided also, that as long as their money lasted, the soup-kitchen at Berryhill should be kept open, and mill kept going, and the little shop maintained, so that to some extent a check might be maintained on the prices of the

hucksters. And in this way they got through their work, not perhaps with the sagacity of Solomon, but as I have said, with an average amount of wisdom, as will always be the case when men set about their tasks with true hearts and honest minds.

And then, when they parted, the two clergymen of the parish shook hands with each other again, having perhaps less animosity against each other than they had ever felt before. There had been a joke or two over the table, at which both had laughed. The priest had wisely shown some deference to the parson, and the parson had immediately returned it, by referring some question to the priest. How often does it not happen that when we come across those whom we have hated and avoided all our lives, we find that they are not quite so bad as we had thought? That old gentleman of whom we wot is never so black as he has been painted."

The work of the committee took them nearly the whole day, so that they did not separate till it was nearly dark. When they did so, Somers and Herbert Fitzgerald rode home together.

'I always live in mortal fear,' said Herbert, 'that Townsend and the priests will break out into warfare.'

'As they haven't done it yet, they won't do it now,' said Somers. 'M'Carthy is not without

demand upon us would be so great, that we should certainly break down. And then where would we be ?'

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CHAPTER V.

THE FRIEND OF THE FAMILY.

ON the day named by Herbert, and only an hour before dinner, Mr. Prendergast did arrive at Castle Richmond. The Great Southern and Western Railway was not then open as far as Mallow, and the journey from Dublin was long and tedious. 'I'll see him of course,' said Sir Thomas to Lady Fitzgerald; 'but I'll put off this business till to-morrow.' This he said in a tone of distress and agony, which showed too plainly how he dreaded the work which he had before him. 'But you'll come in to dinner,' Lady Fitzgerald had said. 'No,' he answered, 'not to day, love; I have to think about this.' And he put his hand up to his head, as though this thinking about it had already been too much for him.

Mr. Prendergast was a man over sixty years of age, being, in fact, considerably senior to Sir Thomas himself. But no one would have dreamed of calling Mr. Prendergast an old man. He was short of stature, well made, and in good

proportion ; he was wiry, strong, and almost robust. He walked as though [in putting his foot to the earth he always wished to proclaim that he was afraid of no man and no thing. His hair was grizzled, and his whiskers were grey, and round about his mouth his face was wrinkled ; but with him even these things hardly seemed to be signs of old age. He was said by many who knew him to be a stern man, and there was that in his face which seemed to warrant such a character. But he had also the reputation of being a very just man ; and those who knew him best could tell tales of him which proved that his sternness was at any rate compatible with a wide benevolence. He was a man who himself had known but little mental suffering, and who owned no mental weakness ; and it might be, therefore, that he was impatient of such weakness in others. To chance acquaintances his manners were not soft, or perhaps palatable ; but to his old friends his very brusqueness was pleasing. He was a bachelor, well off in the world, and, to a certain extent, fond of society. He was a solicitor by profession, having his office somewhere in the purlieus of Lincoln's Inn, and living in an old-fashioned house not far distant from that classic spot. I have said that he owned no mental weakness. When I say further that he was slightly afflicted with personal vanity, and

thought a good deal about the set of his hair, the shape of his coat, the fit of his boots, the whiteness of his hands, and the external trim of his umbrella, perhaps I may be considered to have contradicted myself. But such was the case. He was a handsome man too, with clear, bright, gray eyes, a well-defined nose, and expressive mouth—of which the lips, however, were somewhat too thin. No man with thin lips ever seems to me to be genially human at all points.

Such was Mr. Prendergast; and my readers will, I trust, feel for Sir Thomas, and pity him, in that he was about to place his wounds in the hands of so ruthless a surgeon. But a surgeon, to be of use, should be ruthless in one sense. He should have the power of cutting and cauterizing, of phlebotomy and bone-handling without effect on his own nerves. This power Mr. Prendergast possessed, and therefore it may be said that Sir Thomas had chosen his surgeon judiciously. None of the Castle Richmond family, except Sir Thomas himself, had ever seen this gentleman, nor had Sir Thomas often come across him of late years. But he was what we in England call an old family friend; and I doubt whether we in England have any more valuable English characteristic than that of having old family friends. Old family feuds are not common with us now-a-days—not so common as with some other people. Sons who

now hated their father's enemies would have but a bad chance before a commission of lunacy ; but an old family friend is supposed 'to stick to one from generation to generation.

On his arrival at Castle Richmond he was taken in to Sir Thomas before dinner. 'You find me but in a poor state,' said Sir Thomas, shaking in his fear of what was before him, as the poor wretch does before an iron-wristed dentist who is about to operate. 'You will be better soon,' Mr. Prendergast had said, as a man always does say under such circumstances. What other remark was possible to him ? 'Sir Thomas thinks that he had better not trouble you with business to-night,' said Lady Fitzgerald. To this also Mr. Prendergast agreed willingly. 'We shall both of us be fresher to-morrow, after breakfast,' he remarked, as if any time made any difference to him,—as though he were not always fresh, and ready for any work that might turn up.

That evening was not passed very pleasantly by the family at Castle Richmond. To all of them Mr. Prendergast was absolutely a stranger, and was hardly the man to ingratiate himself with strangers at the first interview. And then, too, they were all somewhat afraid of him. He had come down thither on some business which was to them altogether mysterious, and, as far as they knew, he and he, alone, was to be intrusted with the

mystery. He of course said nothing to them on the subject, but he looked in their eyes as though he were conscious of being replete with secret importance; and on this very account they were afraid of him. And then poor Lady Fitzgerald, though she bore up against the weight of her misery better than did her husband, was herself very wretched. She could not bring herself to believe that all this would end in nothing; that Mr. Prendergast would put everything right, and that after his departure they would go on as happily as ever. This was the doctrine of the younger part of the family, who would not think that anything was radically wrong. But Lady Fitzgerald had always at her heart the memory of her early marriage troubles, and she feared greatly, though she feared she knew not what.

Herbert Fitzgerald and Aunt Letty did endeavour to keep up some conversation with Mr. Prendergast; and the Irish famine was, of course, the subject. But this did not go on pleasantly. Mr. Prendergast was desirous of information; but the statements which were made to him one moment by young Fitzgerald were contradicted in the next by his aunt. He would declare that the better educated of the Roman Catholics were prepared to do their duty by their country, whereas Aunt Letty would consider herself bound both by party feeling and religious

duty, to prove that the Roman Catholics were bad in everything.

‘Oh, Herbert, to hear you say so!’ she exclaimed at one time, ‘it makes me tremble in my shoes. It is dreadful to think that those people should have got such a hold over you.’

‘I really think that the Roman Catholic priests are liberal in their ideas and moral in their conduct.’ This was the speech which had made Aunt Letty tremble in her shoes, and it may, therefore, be conceived that Mr. Prendergast did not find himself able to form any firm opinion from the statements then made to him. Instead of doing so, he set them both down as ‘Wild Irish,’ whom it would be insane to trust, and of whom it was absurd to make inquiries. It may, however, be possibly the case that Mr. Prendergast himself had his own prejudices as well as Aunt Letty and Herbert Fitzgerald.

On the following morning they were still more mute at breakfast. The time was coming in which Mr. Prendergast was to go to work, and even he, gifted though he was with iron nerves, began to feel somewhat unpleasantly the nature of the task which he had undertaken. Lady Fitzgerald did not appear at all. Indeed, during the whole of breakfast-time and up to the moment at which Mr. Prendergast was summoned, she was sitting with her husband, holding his hand in hers, and look-

ing tenderly but painfully into his face. She so sat with him for above an hour, but he spoke to her no word of this revelation he was about to make. Herbert and the girls, and even Aunt Letty sat solemn and silent, as though it was known by them all that something dreadful was to be said and done. At last Herbert, who had left the room, returned to it. 'My father will see you now, Mr. Prendergast, if you will step up to him,' said he; and then he ran to his mother and told her that he should leave the house till dinner-time.

'But if he sends for you Herbert, should you not be in the way?'

'It is more likely that he should send for you; and, were I to remain here, I should be going into his room when he did not want me.' And then he mounted his horse and rode off.

Mr. Prendergast, with serious air and slow steps, and solemn resolve to do what he had to do at any rate with justice, walked away from the dining-room to the baronet's study. The task of an old friend is not always a pleasant one, and Mr. Prendergast felt that it was not so at the present moment. 'Be gentle with him,' said Aunt Letty, catching hold of his arm as he went through the passage. He merely moved his head twice, in token of assent, and then passed on into the room.

The reader will have learnt by this time, with tolerable accuracy, what was the nature of the revelation which Sir Thomas was called upon to make, and he will be tolerably certain as to the advice which Mr. Prendergast, as an honest man, would give. In that respect there was no difficulty. The laws of meum and tuum are sufficiently clear if a man will open his eyes to look at them. In this case they were altogether clear. These broad acres of Castle Richmond did belong to Sir Thomas—for his life. But after his death they could not belong to his son Herbert. It was a matter which admitted of no doubt. No question as to whether the Molletts would or would not hold their tongue could bear upon it in the least. Justice in this case must be done, even though the heavens should fall. It was sad and piteous. Stern and hard as was the man who pronounced this doom, nevertheless the salt tear collected in his eyes and blinded him as he looked upon the anguish which his judgment had occasioned.

Yes, Herbert must be told that he in the world was nobody; that he must earn his bread, and set about doing so right soon. Who could say that his father's life was worth a twelve-month's purchase? He must be told that he was nobody in the world, and instructed also to tell her whom he loved, an Earl's daughter, the same

tidings; that he was nobody, that he would come to possess no property, and that in the law's eyes did not possess even a name. How would his young heart suffice for the endurance of so terrible a calamity? And those pretty girls, so softly brought up—so tenderly nurtured; it must be explained to them too that they must no longer be proud of their father's lineage and their mother's fame. And that other Fitzgerald must be summoned and told of all this; he on whom they had looked down, whom the young heir had robbed of his love, whom they had cast out from among them as unworthy. Notice must be sent to him that he was the heir to Castle Richmond, that he would reign as the future baronet in those gracious chambers. It was he who could now make a great county lady of the daughter of the countess.

'It will be very soon, very soon,' sobbed forth the poor victim. And indeed, to look at him one might say that it would be soon. There were moments when Mr. Prendergast hardly thought that he would live through that frightful day.

But all of which we have yet spoken hardly operated upon the baronet's mind in creating that stupor of sorrow which now weighed him to the earth. It was none of these things that utterly broke him down and crushed him like a mangled reed. He had hardly mind left to remember his

children. It was for the wife of his bosom that he sorrowed.

The wife of his bosom ! He persisted in so calling her through the whole interview, and, even in his weakness, obliged the strong man before him so to name her also. She was his wife before God, and should be his to the end. Ah ! for how short a time was that ! ‘ Is she to leave me ? ’ he once said, turning to his friend, with his hands clasped together, praying that some mercy might be shown to his wretchedness. ‘ Is she to leave me ? ’ he repeated, and then sank on his knees upon the floor.

And how was Mr. Prendergast to answer this question. How was he to decide whether or no this man and woman might still live together as husband and wife. Oh, my reader, think of it if you can, and put yourself for a moment in the place of that old family friend ! ‘ Tell me, tell me ; is she to leave me ? ’ repeated the poor victim of all this misery.

The sternness and justice of the man at last gave way. ‘ No,’ said he, ‘ that cannot, I should think, be necessary. They cannot demand that.’ ‘ But you won’t desert me ? ’ said Sir Thomas, when this crumb of comfort was handed to him. And he remembered as he spoke, the bloodshot eyes of the miscreant who had dared to tell him that the wife of his bosom might be legally torn

from him by the hands of another man. 'You won't desert me?' said Sir Thomas; meaning by that, to bind his friend to an obligation that, at any rate his wife should not be taken from him.

'No,' said Mr. Prendergast, 'I will not desert you; certainly not that; certainly not that.' Just then it was in his heart to promise almost anything that he was asked. Who could have refused such solace as this to a man so terribly overburdened?

But there was another point of view at which Mr. Prendergast had looked from the commencement, but at which he could not get Sir Thomas to look at all. It certainly was necessary that the whole truth in this matter should be made known and declared openly. This fair inheritance must go to the right owner and not to the wrong. Though the affliction on Sir Thomas was very heavy, and would be equally so on all the family, he would not on that account, for the sake of saving him and them from that affliction, be justified in robbing another person of what was legally and actually that other person's property. It was a matter of astonishment to Mr. Prendergast that a conscientious man, as Sir Thomas certainly was, should have been able to look at the matter in any other light; that he should ever have brought himself to have deal-

ings in the matter with Mr. Mollett. Justice in the case was clear, and the truth must be declared. But then they must take good care to find out absolutely what the truth was. Having heard all that Sir Thomas had to say, and having sifted all that he did hear, Mr. Prendergast thoroughly believed, in his heart of hearts, that that wretched miscreant was the actual and true husband of the poor lady whom he would have to see. But it was necessary that this should be proved. Castle Richmond for the family, and all earthly peace of mind for that unfortunate lady and gentleman were not to be given up on the bare word of a scheming scoundrel, for whom no crime would be too black, and no cruelty too monstrous. The proofs must be looked into before anything was done, and they must be looked into before anything was said—to Lady Fitzgerald. We surely may give her that name as yet.

But then, how were they to get at the proofs—at the proofs one way or the other? That Mollett himself had his marriage certificate Sir Thomas declared. That evidence had been brought home to his own mind of the identity of the man—though what was the nature of that evidence he could not now describe—as to that he was quite explicit. Indeed, as I have said above, he almost refused to consider the question as admitting of a doubt. That Mollett was the man to

whom his wife had been married he thoroughly believed ; and, to tell the truth, Mr. Prendergast was afraid to urge him to look for much comfort in this direction. The whole manner of the man, Mollett, had been such as to show that he himself was sure of his ground. Mr. Prendergast could hardly doubt that he was the man, although he felt himself bound to remark that nothing should be said to Lady Fitzgerald till inquiry had been made. Mr. Mollett himself would be at Castle Richmond on the next day but one, in accordance with the appointment made by himself ; and, if necessary, he could be kept in custody till he had been identified as being the man, or as not being the man, who had married Miss Wainwright.

‘There is nobody living with you now who knew Lady Fitzgerald at —— ?’ asked Mr. Prendergast.

‘Yes,’ said Sir Thomas, ‘there is one maid servant.’ And then he explained how Mrs. Jones had lived with his wife before her first marriage, during those few months in which she had been called Mrs. Talbot, and from that day even up to the present hour.’

‘Then she must have known this man,’ said Mr. Prendergast.

But Sir Thomas was not in a frame of mind at all suited to the sifting of evidence. He did not

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care to say anything about Mrs. Jones; he got no crumb of comfort out of that view of the matter. Things had come out, unwittingly for the most part, in his conversations with Mollett, which made him quite certain as to the truth of the main part of the story. All those Dorsetshire localities were well known to the man, the bearings of the house, the circumstances of Mr. Wainwright's parsonage, the whole history of those months; so that on this subject Sir Thomas had no doubt; and we may as well know at once that there was no room for doubt. Our friend of the Kanturk Hotel, South Main Street, Cork, was the man who, thirty years before, had married the child-daughter of the Dorsetshire parson.

Mr. Prendergast, however, stood awhile before the fire balancing the evidence. 'The woman must have known him,' he said to himself, 'and surely she could tell us whether he be like the man. And Lady Fitzgerald herself would know; but then who would have the hardness of heart to ask Lady Fitzgerald to confront that man?'

He remained with Sir Thomas that day for hours. The long winter evening had begun to make itself felt by its increasing gloom before he left him. Wine and biscuits were sent in to them, but neither of them even noticed the

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man who brought them. Twice in the day, however, Mr. Prendergast gave the baronet a glass of sherry, which the latter swallowed unconsciously; and then, at about four, the lawyer prepared to take his leave. 'I will see you early to-morrow,' said he, 'immediately after breakfast.'

'You are going then?' said Sir Thomas, who greatly dreaded being left alone.

'Not away, you know,' said Mr. Prendergast. 'I am not going to leave the house.'

'No,' said Sir Thomas; 'no, of course not, but—' and then he paused.

'Eh!' said Mr. Prendergast, 'you were saying something.'

'They will be coming in to me now,' said Sir Thomas, wailing like a child; 'now, when you are gone; and what am I to say to them?'

'I would say nothing at present; nothing to-day.'

'And my wife?' he asked, again. Through this interview he studiously called her his wife. 'Is—is she to know it?'

'When we are assured that this man's story is true, Sir Thomas, she must know it. That will probably be very soon,—in a day or two. Till then I think you had better tell her nothing.'

'And what shall I say to her?'

'Say nothing. I think it probable that she will not ask any questions. If she does, tell her that the business between you and me is not yet

over. I will tell your son that at present he had better not speak to you on the subject of my visit here.' And then he again took the hand of the unfortunate gentleman, and having pressed it with more tenderness than seemed to belong to him, he left the room.

He left the room, and hurried into the hall and out of the house ; but as he did so he could see that he was watched by Lady Fitzgerald. She was on the alert to go to her husband as soon as she should know that he was alone. Of what then took place between those two we need say nothing, but will wander forth for a while with Mr. Prendergast into the wide-spreading park.

Mr. Prendergast had been used to hard work all his life, but he had never undergone a day of severer toil than that through which he had just past. Nor was it yet over. He had laid it down in a broad way as his opinion that the whole truth in this matter should be declared to the world, let the consequences be what they might ; and to this opinion Sir Thomas had acceded without a word of expostulation. But in this was by no means included all that portion of the burden which now fell upon Mr. Prendergast's shoulders. It would be for him to look into the evidence, and then it would be for him also—heavy and worst task of all—to break the matter to Lady Fitzgerald.

As he sauntered out into the park, to wander about for half-an-hour in the dusk of the evening, his head was throbbing with pain. The family friend in this instance had certainly been severely taxed in the exercise of his friendship. And what was he to do next? How was he to conduct himself that evening in the family circle, knowing, as he so well did, that his coming there was to bring destruction upon them all? 'Be tender to him,' Aunt Letty had said, little knowing how great a call there would be on his tenderness of heart, and how little scope for any tenderness of purpose.

And was it absolutely necessary that that blow should fall in all its severity? He asked himself this question over and over again, and always had to acknowledge that it was necessary. There could be no possible mitigation. The son must be told that he was no son—no son in the eye of the law; the wife must be told that she was no wife, and the distant relative must be made acquainted with his golden prospects. The position of Herbert and Clara, and of their promised marriage, had been explained to him,—and all that too must be shivered into fragments. How was it possible that the penniless daughter of an earl should give herself in marriage to a youth, who was not only penniless also, but illegitimate and without a profession? Look at it

in which way he would, it was all misery and ruin, and it had fallen upon him to pronounce the doom!

He could not himself believe that there was any doubt as to the general truth of Mollett's statement. He would of course inquire. He would hear what the man had to say and see what he had to adduce. He would also examine that old servant, and, if necessary—and if possible also—he would induce Lady Fitzgerald to see the man. But he did feel convinced that on this point there was no doubt. And then he lifted up his hands in astonishment at the folly which had been committed by a marriage under such circumstances—as wise men will do in the decline of years, when young people in the heyday of youth have not been wise. 'If they had waited for a term of years,' he said, 'and if he then had not presented himself! A term of years, such as Jacob served for Rachel, seems so light an affair to old bachelors looking back at the loves of their young friends.

And so he walked about in the dusk by no means a happy man, nor in any way satisfied with the work which was still before him. How was he to face Lady Fitzgerald, or tell her of her fate? In what words must he describe to Herbert Fitzgerald the position which in future he must fill? The past had been dreadful to him, and

the future would be no less so, in spite of his character as a hard, stern man.

When he returned to the house he met young Fitzgerald in the hall. 'Have you been to your father?' he asked immediately. Herbert, in a low voice, and with a saddened face, said that he had just come from his father's room; but Mr. Prendergast at once knew that nothing of the truth had been told to him. 'You found him very weak,' said Mr. Prendergast. 'Oh, very weak,' said Herbert. 'More than weak, utterly prostrate. He was lying on the sofa almost unable to speak. My mother was with him and is still there.'

'And she?' He was painfully anxious to know whether Sir Thomas had been weak enough—or strong enough—to tell his wife any of the story which that morning had been told to him.

'She is doing what she can to comfort him,' said Herbert; 'but it is very hard for her to be left so utterly in the dark.'

Mr. Prendergast was passing on to his room, but at the foot of the stairs Herbert stopped him again, going up the stairs with him, and almost whispering into his ear—

'I trust, Mr Prendergast,' said he, 'that things are not to go on in this way.'

'No, no,' said Mr. Prendergast.

'Because it is unbearable—unbearable for my

mother and for me, and for us all. My mother thinks that some terrible thing has happened to the property; but if so, why should I not be told?’

‘Of anything that really has happened, or does happen, you will be told.’

‘I don’t know whether you are aware of it, Mr. Prendergast, but I am engaged to be married. And I have been given to understand—that is, I thought that this might take place very soon. My mother seems to think that your coming here may—may defer it. If so, I think I have a right to expect that something shall be told to me.’

‘Certainly you have a right, my dear young friend. But Mr. Fitzgerald, for your own sake, for all our sakes, wait patiently for a few hours.’

‘I have waited patiently.’

‘Yes, I know it. You have behaved admirably. But I cannot speak to you now. This time the day after to-morrow, I will tell you everything that I know. But do not speak of this to your mother. I make this promise only to you.’ And then he passed on into his bedroom.

With this Herbert was obliged to be content. That evening he again saw his father and mother, but he told them nothing of what had passed between him and Mr. Prendergast. Lady Fitz-

gerald remained in the study with Sir Thomas the whole evening, nay, almost the whole night, and the slow hours as they passed there were very dreadful. No one came to table but Aunt Letty, Mr. Prendergast, and Herbert, and between them hardly a word was spoken. The poor girls had found themselves utterly unable to appear. They were dissolved in tears, and crouching over the fire in their own room. And the moment that Aunt Letty left the table Mr. Prendergast arose also. He was suffering, he said, cruelly from headache, and would ask permission to go to his chamber. It would have been impossible for him to have sat there pretending to sip his wine with Herbert Fitzgerald.

After this Herbert again went to his father, and then, in the gloom of the evening, he found Mr. Somers in the office, a little magistrate's room, that was used both by him and by Sir Thomas. But nothing passed between them. Herbert had nothing to tell. And then at about nine he also went up to his bedroom. A more melancholy day than that had never shed its gloom upon Castle Richmond.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO WITNESSES.

MR. PRENDERGAST had given himself two days to do all that was to be done, before he told Herbert Fitzgerald the whole of the family history. He had promised that he would then let him know all that there was to be known; and he had done so advisedly, considering that it would be manifestly unjust to leave him in the dark an hour longer than was absolutely necessary. To expect that Sir Thomas himself should, with his own breath and his own words, make the revelation either to his son or to his wife, was to expect a manifest impossibility. He would, altogether, have sank under such an effort, as he had already sank under the effort of telling it to Mr. Prendergast; nor could it be left to the judgment of Sir Thomas to say when the story should be told. He had now absolutely abandoned all judgment in the matter. He had placed himself in the hands of a friend, and he now expected that that

friend should do all that there was to be done. Mr. Prendergast had therefore felt himself justified in making this promise.

But how was he to set about the necessary intervening work, and how pass the intervening hours? It had already been decided that Mr. Abraham Mollett, when he called, should be shown, as usual, into the study, but that he should there find himself confronted, not with Sir Thomas, but with Mr. Prendergast. But there was some doubt whether or no Mr. Mollett would come. It might be that he had means of ascertaining what strangers arrived at Castle Richmond; and it might be, that he would, under the present circumstances, think it expedient to stay away. This visit, however, was not to take place till the second day after that on which Mr. Prendergast had heard the story; and, in the meantime, he had that examination of Mrs. Jones to arrange and conduct.

The breakfast was again very sad. The girls suggested to their brother that he and Mr. Prendergast should sit together by themselves in a small breakfast parlour, but to this he would not assent. Nothing could be more difficult or embarrassing than a conversation between himself and that gentleman, and he moreover was unwilling to let it be thought in the household that affairs were going utterly wrong in the family.

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parlour Mr. Prendergast at once betook himself. 'What can she know about the London property, or about the Irish property?' thought Aunt Letty, to herself; and then it occurred to her that, perhaps, all these troubles arose from some source altogether distinct from the property.

In about a quarter of an hour, a knock came to the breakfast-parlour door, and Mrs. Jones, having been duly summoned, entered the room with a very clean cap and apron, and with a very low curtsy. 'Good morning, Mrs. Jones,' said Mr. Prendergast; 'pray take a seat;' and he pointed to an arm-chair that was comfortably placed near the fire, on the further side of the hearth-rug. Mrs. Jones sat herself down, crossed her hands on her lap, and looked the very personification of meek obedience.

And yet there was something about her which seemed to justify the soubriquet of duchess, which the girls had given to her. She had a certain grandeur about her cap, and a majestical set about the skirt of her dress, and a rigour in the lines of her mouth, which indicated a habit of command, and a confidence in her own dignity, which might be supposed to be the very clearest attribute of duchessdom.

'You have been in this family a long time, I am told, Mrs. Jones,' said Mr. Prendergast, using his pleasantest voice.

‘A very long time indeed,’ said Mrs. Jones.

‘And in a very confidential situation, too. I am told by Sir Thomas that pretty nearly the whole management of the house is left in your hands?’

‘Sir Thomas is very kind, sir; Sir Thomas always was very kind,—poor gentleman!’

‘Poor gentleman, indeed! you may well say that, Mrs. Jones. This family is in great affliction; you are no doubt aware of that.’ And Mr. Prendergast as he spoke got up, went to the door, and saw that it was firmly closed.

Mrs. Jones acknowledged that she was aware of it. ‘It was impossible,’ she said, ‘for servants to shut their eyes to things, if they tried ever so.’

‘Of course, of course,’ said Mr. Prendergast; ‘and particularly for a person so attached to them all as you are.’

‘Well, Mr. Pendrergrass, I am attached to them, certainly. I have seed ’em all born, sir—that is, the young ladies and Mr. Herbert. And as for her ladyship, I didn’t see her born, in course, for we’re both of an age. But it comes much to the same thing, like.’

‘Exactly, exactly; you are quite one of themselves, as Sir Thomas’s sister said to me just now. “Mrs. Jones is quite one of ourselves.” Those were her very words.’

‘I’m sure I’m much obliged to Miss Letty.’

‘Well, as I was saying, a great sorrow has come upon them all, Mrs. Jones. Now will you tell me this—do you know what it is? Can you guess at all? Do the servants know, down stairs?’

‘I’d rather not be guessing on any such matters, Mr. Pendrergrass. And as for them, if they were impudent enough for the like, they’d never dare to tell me. Them Irish servants is very impudent betimes, only they’re good at the heart too, and there isn’t one ’d hurt a dog belonging to the family.’

‘I am sure they would not,’ said Mr. Prendergast. ‘But you yourself, you don’t know what this trouble is?’

‘Not a know,’ said Mrs. Jones, looking down and smoothing her apron.

‘Well, now. Of course you understand, Mrs. Jones—and I must explain this to you to account for my questions. Of course you understand that I am here as Sir Thomas’s friend, to set certain matters right for him if I can.’

‘I supposed as much as that, if you please, sir.’

‘And any questions that I may ask you, I ask altogether on his behalf—on his behalf and on that of his wife, Lady Fitzgerald. I tell you, that you may have no scruples as to answering me.’

‘Oh, sir, I have no scruples as to that. But

of course, sir, in anything I say I must be guided by—by—'

'By your own judgment you were going to say.'

'Yes, sir ; begging pardon for mentioning such a thing to the likes of you, sir.'

'Quite right ; quite right. Everybody should use their own judgment in everything they do or say, more or less. But now, Mrs. Jones, I want to know this : you remember her ladyship's first marriage, I dare say.'

'Yes, sir, I remember it,' said Mrs. Jones, shaking her head.

'It was a sad affair, wasn't it? I remember it well, though I was very young then. So were you too, Mrs. Jones.'

'Young enough, surely, sir ; and foolish enough too. We were the most of us that, then, sir.'

'True, true ; so we were. But you remember the man, don't you—her ladyship's husband? Mr. Talbot, he called himself.' And Mr. Prendergast took some trouble to look as though he did not at all wish to frighten her.

'Yes, I do remember him.' This she said after a considerable pause. 'But it is a very long time ago, you know, Mr. Pendrergrass.'

'A very long time. But I am sure you do remember. You lived in the house you know for some months.'

‘Yes, I did. He was my master for three months, or thereabouts; and to tell the truth, I never got my wages for those three months yet. But that’s neither here nor there.’

‘Do you believe now, Mrs. Jones, that that Mr. Talbot is still alive?’ He asked the question in a very soft voice, and endeavoured not to startle her by his look as he did so. But it was necessary to his purpose that he should keep his eye upon her. Half the answer to his question was to be conveyed by the effect on the muscles of her face which that question would produce. She might perhaps command her voice to tell a falsehood, but be unable to command her face to support it.

‘Believe what, sir?’ said she, and the lawyer could immediately perceive that she did believe and probably knew that that man who had called himself Talbot was still alive.

‘Do you believe, Mrs. Jones, that he is alive—her ladyship’s former husband, you know?’

The question was so terrible in its nature, that Mrs. Jones absolutely shook under it. Did she think that that man was still alive? Why, if she thought that what was she to think of her ladyship? It was in that manner that she would have answered the question, had she known how; but she did not know; she had therefore to look about her for some other words which might be

equally evasive. Those which she selected served her turn just as well. 'Lord bless you, sir!' she said. It was not that the words were expressive, but the tone was decidedly so. It was as though she said, 'How can that man be alive, who has been dead these twenty years and more?' But nevertheless, she was giving evidence all the time against the cause of her poor mistress.

'You think, then, that he is dead?'

'Dead, sir! Oh, laws! why shouldn't he be dead?' And then there was a pause between them for a couple of minutes.

'Mrs. Jones,' said Mr. Prendergast, when he had well considered the matter, 'my belief is that your only object and wish is to do good to your master and mistress.'

'Surely, sir, surely; it would be my bounden duty to do them good, if I knew how.'

'I will tell you how. Speak out to me the whole truth openly and freely. I am here as the friend of Sir Thomas and of her ladyship. He has sent to me that I may advise him what to do in a great trouble that has befallen him, and I cannot give him good advice till I know the truth.'

'What good could it do him, poor gentleman, to know that that man is alive?'

'It will do him good to know the truth; to know whether he be alive or no. Until he knows that he cannot act properly.'

‘Poor gentleman! poor gentleman!’ said Mrs. Jones, putting her handkerchief up to her eyes.

‘If you have any information in this matter—and I think you have, Mrs. Jones—or even any suspicion, it is your duty to tell me.’

‘Well, sir, I’m sure I don’t say against that. You are Sir Thomas’s friend to be sure, and no doubt you know best. And I’m a poor ignorant woman. But to speak candidly, sir, I don’t feel myself free to talk on this matter. I haven’t never made nor marred since I’ve been in this family, not in such matters as them. What I’ve seed, I’ve kep to myself, and when I’ve had my suspects, as a woman can’t but have ’em, I’ve kep’ them to myself also. And saving your presence, sir, and meaning no offence to a gentleman like you,’ and here she got up from her chair and made another curtsey, ‘I think I’d liefer hold my tongue than say anything more on this matter.’ And then she remained standing as though she expected permission to retire.

But there was still another pause, and Mr. Prendergast sat looking at the fire. ‘Don’t you know, ma’am,’ at last he said, with almost an angry voice, ‘that the man was here, in this house, last week?’ And now he turned round at her and looked her full in face. He did not, however, know Mrs. Jones. It might be difficult to coax

her into free communication, but it was altogether out of his power to frighten her into it.

‘What I knows, sir, I knows,’ said she, ‘and what I don’t know, I don’t know. And if you please, sir, Lady Fitzgerald—she’s my missus; and if I’m to be said anything more to about this here matter, why, I’d choose that her ladyship should be by.’ And then she made a little motion as though to walk towards the door, but Mr. Prendergast managed to stop her.

‘But we want to spare Lady Fitzgerald, if we can—at any rate for a while,’ said he. ‘You would not wish to bring more sorrow upon her, would you?’

‘God forbid, Mr. Pendrergrass; and if I could take the sorrow from her heart, I would willingly, and bear it myself to the grave; for her ladyship has been a good lady to me. But no good never did come, and never will, of servants talking of their missusses. And so if you please, sir, I’ll make bold to’—and again she made an attempt to reach the door.

But Mr. Prendergast was not yet persuaded that he could not get from the good old woman the information that he wanted, and he was persuaded that she had the information if only she could be prevailed upon to impart it. So he again stopped her, though on this occasion she made some slight attempt to pass him by as she did so. ‘I don’t

think,' said she, 'that there will be much use in my staying here longer.'

'Wait half a minute, Mrs. Jones, just half a minute. If I could only make you understand how we are all circumstanced here. And I tell you what; though you will trust me with nothing, I will trust you with everything.'

'I don't want no trust, sir; not about all this.'

'But listen to me. Sir Thomas has reason to believe—nay, he feels quite sure—that this man is alive.'

'Poor gentleman! poor gentleman!'

'And has been here in this house two or three times within the last month. Sir Thomas is full sure of this. Now can you tell me whether the man who did come was this Talbot, or was not? If you can answer that positively, either one way or the other, you will do a service to the whole family,—which shall not go unrewarded.'

'I don't want no reward, sir. Ask me to tattle of them for rewards, after thirty years!' And she put her apron up to her eyes.

'Well, then, for the good of the family. Can you say positively that the man who came here to your master was Talbot, or that he was not?'

'Indeed then, sir, I can't say anything positively, nor for that matter, not impositively either.' And then she shut herself up doggedly,

and sat with compressed lips, determined to resist all the lawyer's arts.

Mr. Prendergast did not immediately give up the game, but he failed in learning from her any more than what she had already told him. He felt confident that she did know the secret of this man's existence and presence in the south of Ireland, but he was forced to satisfy himself with that conviction. So he let her go, giving her his hand as she went in token of respect, and receiving her demure curtesy with his kindest smile. 'It may be,' thought he to himself, 'that I have not done with her yet.'

And then he passed another tedious day,—a day that was terribly tedious to them all. He paid a visit to Sir Thomas; but as that arrangement about Mollett's visit had been made between them, it was not necessary that anything should be done or said about the business on hand. It was understood that further action was to be stayed till that visit was over, and therefore for the present he had nothing to say to Sir Thomas. He did not see Lady Fitzgerald throughout the whole day; and it appeared to him, not unnaturally, that she purposely kept out of his way, anticipating evil from his coming. He took a walk with Herbert and Mr. Somers, and was driven as far as the soup-kitchen and mill at Berry Hill, inquiring into the state of the poor, or rather

pretending to inquire. It was a pretence with them all, for at the present moment their minds were intent on other things. And then there was that terrible dinner, that mockery of a meal, at which the three ladies were constrained to appear, but at which they found it impossible to eat or to speak. Mr. Somers had been asked to join the party, so that the scene after dinner might be less painful; but even he felt that he could not talk as was his ordinary wont. Horrible suspicions of the truth had gradually come upon him; and with a suspicion of such a truth—of such a tragedy in the very household—how could he, or how could any one hold a conversation? and then at about half-past nine, Mr. Prendergast was again in his bed-room.

On the next morning he was early with Sir Thomas, persuading him to relinquish altogether the use of his study for that day. On that evening they were to have another interview there, in which Mr. Prendergast was to tell his friend the result of what had been done. And then he had to arrange certain manœuvring with the servants in which he was forced to obtain the assistance of Herbert. Mollett was to be introduced into the study immediately on his arrival, and this was to be done in such a manner that Mrs. Jones might assuredly be ignorant of his arrival. On this duty our old friend Richard was

employed, and it was contrived that Mrs. Jones should be kept upstairs with her mistress. All this was difficult enough, but he could not explain even to Herbert the reason why such scheming was necessary. Herbert, however, obeyed in silence, knowing that something dreadful was about to fall on them.

Immediately after breakfast Mr. Prendergast betook himself to the study, and there remained with his London newspaper in his hand. A dozen times he began a leading article, in which the law was laid down with great perspicuity and certainty as to the present state of Ireland; but had the writer been treating of the Sandwich Islands he could not have attracted less of his attention. He found it impossible to read. On that evening he would have to reveal to Herbert Fitzgerald what was to be his fate!

Matthew Mollett at his last interview with Sir Thomas had promised to call on this day, and had been counting the days till that one should arrive on which he might keep his promise. He was terribly in want of cash, and as we all know Aby had entirely failed in raising the wind—any immediate fund of wind—on the occasion of his visit to the baronet; and now, when this morning came, old Mollett was early on the road. Aby had talked of going with him, but Aby had failed so signally on the occasion of the visit which he

did make to Castle Richmond, that he had been without the moral strength to persist in his purpose.

‘Then I shall write to the baronet and go alone to London,’ said Mollett, père.

‘Bother!’ replied Mollett, fils. ‘You hain’t got the cash, governor.’

‘I’ve got what ’ll take me there, my boy, whether you know it or not. And Sir Thomas ’ll be ready enough to send me a remittance when I’m once out of this country.’

And so Aby had given way,—partly perhaps in terror of Mr. Somers’ countenance; and Matthew Mollett started again in a covered car on that cold journey over the Boggeragh mountains. It was still mid-winter, being now about the end of February, and the country was colder, and wetter, and more wretched, and the people in that desolate district more ragged and more starved than when he had last crossed it. But what were their rags and starvation to him? He was worse off than they were. They were merely dying, as all men must do. But he was inhabiting a hell on earth, which no man need do. They came out to him in shoals begging; but they came in vain, getting nothing from him but a curse through his chattering teeth. What right had they to torment with their misery one so much more wretched than themselves?

At a little before twelve the covered car was at the front door of Castle Richmond house, and there was Richard under the porch. On former occasions Mr. Mollett had experienced some little delay in making his way into the baronet's presence. The servants had looked cold upon him, and he had felt as though there might be hot ploughshares under his feet at any step which he took. But now everything seemed to be made easy. Richard took him in tow without a moment's delay, told him confidentially that Sir Thomas was waiting for him, bade the covered car to be driven round into the yard with a voice that was uncommonly civil, seeing that it was addressed to a Cork carman, and then ushered Mr. Mollett through the hall and down the passage without one moment's delay. Wretched as he had been during his journey—wretched as an infernal spirit—his hopes were now again elated, and he dreamed of a golden paradise. There was something pleasant in feeling his mastery over that poor old shattered baronet.

‘The gentleman to wait upon Sir Thomas,’ said Richard, opening the study door; and then Mr. Mollett senior found himself in the presence of Mr. Prendergast.

Mr. Prendergast was sitting in a high-backed easy chair, facing the fire, when the announcement was made, and therefore Mollett still fancied

that he was in the presence of Sir Thomas until he was well into the room and the door was closed upon him; otherwise he might probably have turned on his heels and bolted. He had had three or four interviews with Mr. Prendergast, having received different sums of money from that gentleman's hands, and had felt on all such occasions that he was being looked through and through. Mr. Prendergast had asked but few questions, never going into the matter of his, Mollett's, pecuniary connexion with Sir Thomas; but there had always been that in the lawyer's eye which had frightened the miscreant, which had quelled his bluster as soon as it was assumed, and had told him that he was known for a black-guard and a scoundrel. And now when this man, with the terrible gray eye, got up from Sir Thomas's chair, and wheeling round confronted him, looking him full in the face, and frowning on him as an honest man does frown on an unconvicted rascal—when, I say, this happened to Mr. Mollett senior, he thoroughly at that moment wished himself back in London. He turned his eye round to the door, but that was closed behind him. He looked around to see whether Sir Thomas was there, but no one was in the room with him but Mr. Prendergast. Then he stood still, and as that gentleman did not address him, he was obliged to speak; the silence was too awful for

him—‘Oh, Mr. Prendergast!’ said he. ‘Is that you?’

‘Yes, Mr. Mollett, it is I.’

‘Oh, ah—I suppose you are here about business of your own. I was wishing to see Sir Thomas about a little business of my own; maybe he’s not in the way.’

‘No, he is not; not exactly. But perhaps, Mr. Mollett, I can do as well. You have known me before, you know, and you may say to me openly anything you have to say to Sir Thomas.’

‘Well; I don’t know about that, sir; my business is with the baronet—particular.’ Mr. Mollett, as he spoke, strained every nerve to do so without appearance of dismay; but his efforts were altogether ineffectual. He could not bring himself to look Mr. Prendergast in the face for a moment, or avoid feeling like a dog that dreads being kicked. All manner of fears came upon him, and he would at the moment have given up all his hopes of money from the Castle Richmond people to have been free from Mr. Prendergast and his influence. And yet Mollett was not a coward in the ordinary sense of the word. Indeed he had been very daring in the whole management of this affair. But then a course of crime makes such violent demands on a man’s courage. Let any one think of the difference of attacking a thief, and being attacked as a thief!

We are apt to call bad men cowards without much consideration. Mr. Mollett was not without pluck, but his pluck was now quelled. The circumstances were too strong against him.

‘Listen to me, Mr. Mollett——; and, look here, sir; never mind turning to the door; you can’t go now till you and I have had some conversation. You may make up your mind to this: you will never see Sir Thomas Fitzgerald again—unless indeed he should be in the witness-box when you are standing in the dock.’

‘Mr. Prendergast; sir!’

‘Well. Have you any reason to give why you should not be put in the dock? How much money have you got from Sir Thomas during the last two years by means of those threats which you have been using? You were well aware when you set about this business that you were committing felony; and have probably felt tolerably sure at times that you would some day be brought up short. That day has come.’

Mr. Prendergast had made up his mind that nothing could be gained by soft usage with Mr. Mollett. Indeed nothing could be gained in any way, by any usage, unless it could be shown that Mollett and Talbot were not the same person. He could afford therefore to tell the scoundrel that he was a scoundrel, and to declare against him—war to the knife. The more that Mollett

trembled, the more abject he became, the easier would be the task Mr. Prendergast now had in hand. 'Well, sir,' he continued, 'are you going to tell me what business has brought you here to-day?'

But Mr. Mollett, though he did shake in his shoes, did not look at the matter exactly in the same light. He could not believe that Sir Thomas would himself throw up the game on any consideration, or that Mr. Prendergast as his friend would throw it up on his behalf. He, Mollett, had a strong feeling that he could have continued to deal easily with Sir Thomas, and that it might be very hard to deal at all with Mr. Prendergast; but nevertheless the game was still open. Mr. Prendergast would probably distrust the fact of his being the lady's husband, and it would be for him therefore to use the indubitable proofs of the facts that were in his possession.

'Sir Thomas knows very well what I've come about,' he began, slowly; 'and if he's told you, why you know too; and in that case——.'

But what might or might not happen in that case Mr. Mollett had not now an opportunity of explaining, for the door opened and Mrs. Jones entered the room.

'When that man comes this morning,' Mr. Prendergast had said to Herbert, 'I must get you to induce Mrs. Jones to come to us in the study

as soon as may be.' He had not at all explained to Herbert why this was necessary, nor had he been at any pains to prevent the young heir from thinking and feeling that some terrible mystery hung over the house. There was a terrible mystery—which indeed would be more terrible still when it ceased to be mysterious. He therefore quietly explained to Herbert what he desired to have done, and Herbert, awaiting the promised communication of that evening, quietly did as he was bid.

'You must go down to him, Jones,' he had said.

'But I'd rather not, sir. I was with him yesterday for two mortal hours; and, oh, Mr. Herbert! it ain't for no good.'

But Herbert was inexorable; and Mrs. Jones, feeling herself overcome by the weight of the misfortune that was oppressing them all, obeyed, and descending to her master's study, knocked at the door. She knew that Mr. Prendergast was there, and she knew that Sir Thomas was not; but she did not know that any stranger was in the room with Mr. Prendergast. Mr. Mollett had not heard the knock, nor, indeed, had Mr. Prendergast; but Mrs. Jones having gone through this ceremony, opened the door and entered.

'Sir Thomas knows; does he?' said Mr. Prendergast, when Mollett ceased to speak on the woman's entrance. 'Oh, Mrs. Jones, good morning. Here is your old master, Mr. Talbot.'

Mollett of course turned round, and found himself confronted with the woman. They stared at each other for some moments, and then Mollett said, in a low dull voice, 'Yes, she knows me; it was she that lived with her at Tallyho Lodge.'

'You remember him now, Mrs. Jones; don't you?' said Mr. Prendergast.

For another moment or two Mrs. Jones stood silent; and then she acknowledged herself overcome, and felt that the world around her had become too much for her. 'Yes,' said she, slowly; 'I remember him,' and then sinking into a chair near the door, she put her apron up to her eyes, and burst into tears.

'No doubt about that; she remembers me well enough,' said Mollett, thinking that this was so much gained on his side. 'But there ain't a doubt about the matter at all, Mr. Prendergast. You look here, and you'll see it all as plain as black and white.' And Mr. Mollett dragged a large pocket-book from his coat, and took out of it certain documents, which he held before Mr. Prendergast's eyes, still keeping them in his own hand. 'Oh, I'm all right; I am,' said Mollett.

'Oh, you are, are you?' said the lawyer, just glancing at the paper, which he would not appear to heed. 'I am glad you think so.'

‘If there were any doubt about it, she’d know,’ said he, pointing away up towards the body of the house. Both Mr. Prendergast and Mrs. Jones understood well who was that she to whom he alluded.

‘You are satisfied at any rate, Mrs. Jones,’ said the lawyer. But Mrs. Jones had hidden her face in her apron, and would not look up. She could not understand why this friend of the family should push the matter so dreadfully against them. If he would rise from his chair and destroy that wretch who stood before them, then indeed he might be called a friend!’

Mr. Prendergast had now betaken himself to the door, and was standing with his back to it, and with his hands in his trousers-pockets, close to the chair on which Mrs. Jones was sitting. He had resolved that he would get that woman’s spoken evidence out of her; and he had gotten it. But now, what was he to do with her next? —with her or with the late Mr. Talbot of Tallyho Lodge? And having satisfied himself of that fact, which from the commencement he had never doubted, what could he best do to spare the poor lady who was so terribly implicated in this man’s presence?

‘Mrs. Jones,’ said he, standing over her, and gently touching her shoulder, ‘I am sorry to have pained you in this way; but it was neces-

sary that we should know, without a doubt, who this man is, —and who he was. Truth is always the best, you know. So good a woman as you cannot but understand that.'

'I suppose it is, sir, —I suppose it is,' said Mrs. Jones, through her tears, now thoroughly humbled. The world was pretty nearly at an end, as far as she was concerned. Here, in this very house of Castle Richmond, in Sir Thomas's own room, was her ladyship's former husband, acknowledged as such! What further fall of the planet into broken fragments could terrify, or drive her from her course more thoroughly than this? Truth! yes, truth in the abstract, might be very good. But such a truth as this! how could any one ever say that that was good? Such was the working of her mind; but she took no trouble to express her thoughts.

'Yes,' continued Mr. Prendergast, speaking still in a low voice, with a tone that was almost tender, 'truth is always best. Look at this wretched man here! He would have killed the whole family—destroyed them one by one—had they consented to assist him in concealing the fact of his existence. The whole truth will now be known; and it is very dreadful; but it will not be so dreadful as the want of truth.'

'My poor lady! my poor lady!' almost screamed Mrs. Jones from under her apron, wagging her

head, and becoming almost convulsive in her grief.

‘Yes, it is very sad. But you will live to acknowledge that even this is better than living in that man’s power.’

‘I don’t know that,’ said Mollett. ‘I am not so bad as you’d make me. I don’t want to distress the lady.’

‘No, not if you are allowed to rob the gentleman till there’s not a guinea left for you to suck at. I know pretty well the extent of the evil that’s in you. If we were to kick you from here to Cork, you’d forgive all that, so that we still allowed you to go on with your trade. I wonder how much money you’ve had from him altogether?’

‘What does the money signify? What does the money signify?’ said Mrs. Jones, still wagging her head beneath her apron. ‘Why didn’t Sir Thomas go on paying it, and then my lady need know nothing about it?’

It was clear that Mrs. Jones would not look at the matter in a proper light. As far as she could see, there was no reason why a fair bargain should not have been made between Mollett and Sir Thomas,—made and kept on both sides, with mutual convenience. That doing of justice at the cost of falling heavens was not intelligible to her limited philosophy. Nor did she bethink herself, that a leech will not give over sucking

until it be gorged with blood. Mr. Prendergast knew that such leeches as Mr. Mollett never leave the skin as long as there is a drop of blood left within the veins.

Mr. Prendergast was still standing against the door, where he had placed himself to prevent the unauthorized departure of either Mrs. Jones or Mr. Mollett; but now he was bethinking himself that he might as well bring this interview to an end. 'Mr. Mollett,' said he, 'you are probably beginning to understand that you will not get much more money from the Castle Richmond family?'

'I don't want to do any harm to any of them,' said Mollett, humbly; 'and if I don't make myself troublesome, I hope Sir Thomas will consider me.'

'It is out of your power, sir, to do any further harm to any of them. You don't pretend to think that after what has passed, you can have any personal authority over that unfortunate lady?'

'My poor mistress! my poor mistress!' sobbed Mrs. Jones.

'You cannot do more injury than you at present have done. No one is now afraid of you; no one here will ever give you another shilling. When and in what form you will be prosecuted for inducing Sir Thomas to give you money, I cannot yet tell. Now, you may go; and I

strongly advise you never to show your face here again. If the people about here knew who you are, and what you are, they would not let you off the property with a whole bone in your skin. Now go, sir. Do you hear me?’

‘Upon my word, Mr. Prendergast, I have not intended any harm!’

‘Go, sir!’

‘And even now, Mr. Prendergast, it can all be made straight, and I will leave the country altogether, if you wish it—’

‘Go, sir!’ shouted Mr. Prendergast. ‘If you do not move at once, I will ring the bell for the servants!’

‘Then, if misfortune comes upon them, it is your doing, and not mine,’ said Mollett.

‘Oh, Mr. Pendrergrass, if it can be hushed up—’ said Mrs. Jones, rising from her chair and coming up to him with her hands clasped together. ‘Don’t send him away in your anger; don’t see now, sir. Think of her ladyship. Do, do, do;’ and the woman took hold of his arm, and looked up into his face with her eyes swimming with tears. Then going to the door she closed it, and returning again, touched his arm, and again appealed to him. ‘Think of Mr. Herbert, sir, and the young ladies! What are they to be called, sir, if this man is to be my lady’s husband? Oh, Mr. Pendrergrass, let him go

away, out of the kingdom; do let him go away.'

'I'll be off to Australia by the next boat, if you'll only say the word,' said Mollett. To give him his due, he was not at that moment thinking altogether of himself and of what he might get. The idea of the misery which he had brought on these people, did, to a certain measure, come home to him. And it certainly did come home to him also, that his own position was very perilous.

'Mrs. Jones,' said the lawyer, seeming to pay no attention whatever to Mollett's words, 'you know nothing of such men as that. If I were to take him at his word now, he would turn upon Sir Thomas again before three weeks were over.'

'By ——, I would not! By all that is holy, I would not. Mr. Prendergast, do—.'

'Mr. Mollett, I will trouble you to walk out of this house. I have nothing further to say to you.'

'Oh, very well, sir.' And then slowly Mollett took his departure, and finding his covered car at the door, got into it without saying another word to any of the Castle Richmond family.

'Mrs. Jones,' said Mr. Prendergast, as soon as Mollett was gone, 'I believe I need not trouble you any further. Your conduct has done you great honour, and I respect you greatly as an honest woman and an affectionate friend.'

Mrs. Jones could only acknowledge this by loud sobs.

‘ For the present, if you will take my advice, you will say nothing of this to your mistress.’

‘ No, sir, no ; I shall say nothing. Oh, dear ! oh dear !’

‘ The whole matter will be known soon, but in the mean time, we may as well remain silent. Good day to you.’ And then Mrs. Jones also left the room, and Mr. Prendergast was alone.

CHAPTER VII.

FAIR ARGUMENTS.

As Mollett left the house he saw two men walking down the road away from the sweep before the hall door, and as he passed them he recognised one as the young gentleman of the house. He also saw that a horse followed behind them, on the grass by the roadside, not led by the hand, but following with the reins laid loose upon his neck. They took no notice of him or his car, but allowed him to pass as though he had no concern whatever with the destinies of either of them. They were Herbert and Owen Fitzgerald.

The reader will perhaps remember the way in which Owen left Desmond Court on the occasion of his last visit there. It cannot be said that what he had heard had in any way humbled him, nor indeed had it taught him to think that Clara Desmond looked at him altogether with indifference. Greatly as she had injured him, he could

not bring himself to look upon her as the chief sinner. It was Lady Desmond who had done it all. It was she who had turned against him because of his poverty, who had sold her daughter to his rich cousin, and robbed him of the love which he had won for himself. Or perhaps not of the love—it might be that this was yet his; and if so, was it not possible that he might beat the countess at her own weapons? Thinking over this, he felt that it was necessary for him to do something, to take some step; and therefore he resolved to go boldly to his cousin, and tell him that he regarded Lady Clara Desmond as still his own.

On this morning, therefore, he had ridden up to the Castle Richmond door. It was now many months since he had been there, and he was no longer entitled to enter the house on the acknowledged intimate footing of a cousin. He rode up, and asked the servant with grave ceremony whether Mr. Herbert Fitzgerald were at home. He would not go in, he said, but if Mr. Herbert were there he would wait for him at the porch. Herbert at the time was standing in the dining-room, all alone, gloomily leaning against the mantelpiece. There was nothing for him to do during the whole of that day but wait for the evening, when the promised revelation would be made to him. He knew that Mollett and Mrs.

Jones were with Mr. Prendergast in the study, but what was the matter now being investigated between them—that he did not know. And till he knew that, closely as he was himself concerned, he could meddle with nothing. But it was already past noon and the evening would soon be there.

In this mood he was interrupted by being told that his cousin Owen was at the door. ‘He won’t come in at all, Mr. Herbert,’ Richard had said; for Richard, according to order, was still waiting about the porch; ‘but he says that you are to go to him there.’ And then Herbert, after considering the matter for a moment, joined his cousin at the front entrance.

‘I want to speak to you a few words,’ said Owen; ‘but as I hear that Sir Thomas is not well, I will not go into the house; perhaps you will walk with me as far as the lodge. Never mind the mare, she will not go astray.’ And so Herbert got his hat and accompanied him. For the first hundred yards neither of them said anything. Owen would not speak of Clara till he was well out of hearing from the house, and at the present moment Herbert had not much inclination to commence a conversation on any subject.

Owen was the first to speak. ‘Herbert,’ said he, ‘I have been told that you are engaged to marry Lady Clara Desmond.’

‘And so I am,’ said Herbert, feeling very little inclined to admit of any question as to his privilege in that respect. Things were happening around him which might have—Heaven only knows what consequence. He did fear—fear with a terrible dread that something might occur which would shatter the cup of his happiness, and rob him of the fruition of his hopes. But nothing had occurred as yet. ‘And so I am,’ he said; ‘it is no wonder that you should have heard it, for it has been kept no secret. And I also have heard of your visit to Desmond Court. It might have been as well, I think, if you had stayed away.’

‘I thought differently,’ said Owen, frowning blackly. ‘I thought that the most straightforward thing for me was to go there openly, having announced my intention, and tell them both, mother and daughter, that I hold myself as engaged to Lady Clara, and that I hold her as engaged to me.’

‘That is absurd nonsense. She cannot be engaged to two persons.’

‘Anything that interferes with you, you will of course think absurd. I think otherwise. It is hardly more than twelve months since she and I were walking there together, and then she promised me her love. I had known her long and well, when you had hardly seen her. I knew her and loved her; and what is more, she loved me.

Remember, it is not I only that say so. She said it herself, and swore that nothing should change her. I do not believe that anything has changed her.'

'Do you mean to say that at present she cares nothing for me? Owen, you must be mad on this matter.'

'Mad; yes of course; if I think that any girl can care for me while you are in the way. Strange as it may appear, I am as mad even as that. There are people who will not sell themselves even for money and titles. I say again, that I do not believe her to be changed. She has been weak, and her mother has persuaded her. To her mother, rank and money, titles and property, are everything. She has sold her daughter, and I have come to ask you, whether, under such circumstances you intend to accept the purchase.'

In his ordinary mood Herbert Fitzgerald was by no means a quarrelsome man. Indeed we may go further than that, and say that he was very much the reverse. His mind was argumentative rather than impulsive, and in all matters he was readier to persuade than overcome. But his ordinary nature had been changed. It was quite new with him to be nervous and fretful, but he was so at the present moment. He was deeply concerned in the circumstances around

him, but yet had been allowed no voice in them. In this affair that was so peculiarly his own,—this of his promised bride, he was determined that no voice should be heard but his own; and now, contrary to his wont, he was ready enough to quarrel with his cousin.

Of Owen we may say, that he was a man prone to fighting of all sorts, and on all occasions. By fighting I do not mean the old-fashioned resource of putting an end to fighting by the aid of two pistols, which were harmless in nineteen cases out of twenty. In saying that Owen Fitzgerald was prone to fight, I do not allude to fighting of that sort; I mean that he was impulsive, and ever anxious to contend and conquer. To yield was to him ignoble, even though he might know that he was yielding to the right. To strive for mastery was to him noble, even though he strove against those who had a right to rule, and strove on behalf of the wrong. Such was the nature of his mind and spirit; and this nature had impelled him to his present enterprise at Castle Richmond. But he had gone thither with an unwonted resolve not to be passionate. He had, he had said to himself, right on his side, and he had purposed to argue it out fairly with his more cold-blooded cousin. The reader may probably guess the result of these fair arguments on such a subject. ‘And I have come to ask you,’ he said, ‘whether

under such circumstances you intend to accept the purchase?’

‘I will not allow you to speak of Lady Desmond in such language; nor of her daughter,’ said Herbert, angrily.

‘Ah! but, Herbert, you must allow me; I have been ill used in this matter, and I have a right to make myself heard.’

‘Is it I that have ill used you? I did not know before that gentlemen made loud complaints of such ill usage from the hands of ladies.’

‘If the ill usage, as you please to call it—’

‘It is your own word.’

‘Very well. If this ill usage came from Clara Desmond herself, I should be the last person to complain of it; and you would be the last person to whom I should make complaint. But I feel sure that it is not so. She is acting under the influence of her mother, who has frightened her into this thing which she is doing. I do not believe that she is false herself.’

‘I am sure that she is not false. We are quite agreed there, but it is not likely that we should agree further. To tell you the truth frankly I think you are ill-judged to speak to me on such a topic.’

‘Perhaps in that respect you will allow me to think for myself. But I have not yet said that which I came to say. My belief is that unfair

and improper restraint is put upon Clara Desmond, that she has been induced by her mother to accept your offer in opposition to her own wishes, and that therefore it is my duty to look upon her as still betrothed to me. I do so regard her, and shall act under such conviction. The first thing that I do therefore is to call upon you to relinquish your claim.'

'What, to give her up?'

'Yes, to give her up;—to acknowledge that you cannot honestly call upon her to fulfil her pledge to you?'

'The man must be raving,' Herbert said.

'Very probably; but remember this, it may be that he will rave to some purpose, when such insolence will be but of little avail to you. Raving! Yes, I suppose that a man poor as I am must be mad indeed to set his heart upon anything that you may choose to fancy.'

'All that is nonsense; Owen, I ask for nothing but my own. I won her love fairly, and I mean to keep it firmly.'

'You may possibly have won her hand, but never her heart. You are rich, and it may be that even she will condescend to barter her hand; but I doubt it; I altogether doubt it. It is her mother's doing, as it was plain enough for me to see the other day at Desmond Court; but much as she may fear her mother, I cannot think

that she will go to the altar with a lie in her mouth.'

And then they walked on in silence for a few yards. Herbert was anxious to get back to the house, and was by no means desirous of continuing this conversation with his cousin. He at any rate could get nothing by talking about Lady Clara Desmond to Owen Fitzgerald. He stopped therefore on the path, and said, that if Owen had nothing further to say, he, Herbert, would go back to the house.

'Nothing further! Nothing further, if you understand me; but you do not. You are not honest enough in this matter to understand any purpose but your own.'

'I tell you what, Owen: I did not come out here to hear myself abused; and I will not stand it. According to my idea you had no right whatever to speak to me about Lady Clara Desmond. But you are my cousin; and therefore I have borne it. It may be as well that we should both understand that it is once for all. I will not listen to you again on the same subject.'

'Oh, you won't. Upon my word you are a very great man! You will tell me next, I suppose, that this is your demesne, and will warn me off!'

'Even if I did that, I should not be wrong, under such provocation.'

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‘Very well, sir; then I will go off. But remember this, Herbert Fitzgerald, you shall live to rue the day when you treated me with such insolence. And remember this also, Clara Desmond is not your wife as yet. Everything now seems happy with you, and fortunate; you have wealth and a fine house, and a family round you, while I am there all alone, left like a dog, as far as my own relatives are concerned. But yet it may come to pass that the Earl of Desmond’s daughter will prefer my hand to yours, and my house to your house. They who mount high may chance to get a fall.’ And then, having uttered this caution, he turned to his mare, and putting his hand upon the saddle, jumped into his seat, and pressing her into a gallop, darted off across the grass.

He had not meant anything specially by his threat; but his heart was sore within him. During some weeks past, he had become sick of the life that he was leading. He had begun to hate his own solitary house—his house that was either solitary, or filled with riot and noise. He sighed for the quiet hours that were once his at Desmond Court, and the privilege of constant entrance there, which was now denied him. His cousin Herbert had everything at his command—wealth, station, family ties, society, and all the consideration of high place. Every blessing was at the

feet of the young heir; but every blessing was not enough, unless Clara Desmond was also added. All this seemed so cruel to him, as he sat alone in his parlour at Hap House, meditating on his future course of life! And then he would think of Clara's promise, of her assurance that nothing should frighten her from her pledge. He thought of this as though the words had been spoken to him only yesterday. He pondered over these things till he hated his cousin Herbert; and hating him, he vowed that Clara Desmond should not be his wife. 'Is he to have everything?' he would say to himself. 'No, by heavens! not everything. He has enough, and may be contented; but he shall not have all.' And now, with similar thoughts running through his mind, he rode back to Hap House.

And Herbert turned back to Castle Richmond. As he approached the front door, he met Mr. Prendergast, who was leaving the house; but they had no conversation with each other. Herbert was in hopes that he might now, at once, be put out of suspense. Mollett was gone; and would it not be better that the tale should be told? But it was clear that Mr. Prendergast had no intention of lessening by an hour the interval he had given himself. He merely muttered a few words passing on, and Herbert went into the house.

And then there was another long, tedious, dull afternoon. Herbert sat with his sisters, but they had not the heart to talk to each other. At about four a note was brought to him. It was from Mr. Prendergast, begging Herbert to meet him in Sir Thomas's study at eight. Sir Thomas had not been there during the day; and now did not intend to leave his own room. They dined at half-past six; and the appointment was therefore to take place almost immediately after dinner.

'Tell Mr. Prendergast that I will be there,' he said to the servant. And so that afternoon passed away, and the dinner also, very slowly and very sadly.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TELLING OF THE TALE.

THE dinner passed away as the former dinners had done ; and as soon as Aunt Letty got up Mr. Prendergast also rose, and touching Herbert on his shoulder, whispered into his ear, ‘ You’ll come to me at eight then.’ Herbert nodded his head ; and when he was alone he looked at his watch. These slow dinners were not actually very long, and there still remained to him some three-quarters of an hour for anticipation

What was to be the nature of this history ? That it would affect himself personally in the closest manner he could not but know. There seemed to be no doubt on the minds of any of them that the affair was one of money, and his father’s money questions were his money questions. Mr. Prendergast would not have been sent for with reference to any trifle ; nor would any pecuniary difficulty that was not very serious have thrown his father into such a state of misery.

Could it be that the fair inheritance was absolutely in danger?

Herbert Fitzgerald was by no means a selfish man. As regarded himself, he could have met ruin in the face with more equanimity than most young men so circumstanced. The guilt of the world had not eaten into his soul; his heart was not as yet wedded to the splendour of pinchbeck. This is saying much for him; for how seldom is it that the hearts and souls of the young are able to withstand pinchbeck and gilding? He was free from this pusillanimity; free as yet as regarded himself; but he was hardly free as regarded his betrothed. He had promised her, not in spoken words but in his thoughts, rank, wealth, and all the luxuries of his promised high position; and now on her behalf, it nearly broke his heart to think that they might be endangered.

Of his mother's history, he can hardly be said to have known anything. That there had been something tragic in her early life; that something had occurred before his father's marriage; and that his mother had been married twice, he had learned,—he hardly knew when or from whom. But on such matters there had never been conversation between him and any of his own family; and it never occurred to him that all this sorrow arose in any way from this subject. That his father had taken some fatal step

with regard to the property—had done some foolish thing for which he could not forgive himself, that was the idea with which his mind was filled:

He waited, with his watch in his hand, till the dial showed him that it was exactly eight; and then, with a sinking heart, he walked slowly out of the dining-room along the passage, and into his father's study. For an instant he stood with the handle in his hand. He had been terribly anxious for the arrival of this moment, but now that it had come, he would almost fain have had it again postponed. His heart sank very low as he turned the lock, and entering, found himself in the presence of Mr. Prendergast.

Mr. Prendergast was standing with his back to the fire. For him, too, the last hour had been full of bitterness; his heart also had sunk low within him; his blood had run cold within his veins: he too, had it been possible, would have put off this wretched hour.

Mr. Prendergast, it may be, was not much given to poetry; but the feeling, if not the words, were there within him. The work which a friend has to perform for a friend is so much heavier than that which comes in the way of any profession!

When Herbert entered the room, Mr. Prendergast came forward from where he was standing,

and took him by the hand. 'This is a very sad affair,' he said; 'very sad.'

'At present I know nothing about it,' said Herbert. 'As I see people about me so unhappy, I suppose it is sad. If there be anything that I hate, it is a mystery.'

'Sit down, Mr. Fitzgerald,' said the other; 'sit down.' And Mr. Prendergast himself sat down in the chair that was ordinarily occupied by Sir Thomas. Although he had been thinking about it all the day, he had not even yet made up his mind how he was to begin his story. Even now he could not help thinking whether it might be possible for him to leave it untold. But it was not possible.

'Mr. Fitzgerald,' said he, 'you must prepare yourself for tidings which are very grievous indeed—very grievous.'

'Whatever it is I must bear it,' said he.

'I hope you have that moral strength which enables a man to bear misfortune. I have not known you in happy days, and therefore perhaps can hardly judge; but it seems to me that you do possess such courage. Did I not think so, I could hardly go through the task that is before me.'

Here he paused as though he expected some reply, some assurance that his young friend did possess this strength of which he spoke; but

Herbert said nothing—nothing out loud. ‘If it were only for myself! if it were only for myself!’ It was thus that he spoke to his own heart.

‘Mr. Fitzgerald,’ continued the lawyer, ‘I do not know how far you may be acquainted with the history of your mother’s first marriage.’

Herbert said that he was hardly acquainted with it in any degree; and explained that he merely knew the fact that his mother had been married before she met Sir Thomas.

‘I do not know that I need recount all the circumstances to you now, though doubtless you will learn them. Your mother’s conduct throughout was, I believe, admirable.’

‘I am quite sure of that. No amount of evidence could make me believe the contrary.’

‘And there is no tittle of evidence to make any one think so. But in her early youth, when she was quite a child, she was given in marriage to a man—to a man of whom it is impossible to speak in terms too black, or in language too strong. And now, this day—

But here he paused. It had been his intention to say that that very man, the first husband of this loved mother now looked upon as dead for so many years, this miscreant of whom he had spoken—that this man had been in that room that very day. But he hardly knew how to frame the words.

‘Well,’ said Herbert, ‘well;’ and he spoke in a hoarse voice that was scarcely audible.

Mr. Prendergast was afraid to bring out the very pith of his story in so abrupt a manner. He wished to have the work over, to feel, that as regarded Herbert it was done,—but his heart failed him when he came to it.

‘Yes,’ he said, going back as it were to his former thoughts. ‘A heartless, cruel, debauched, unscrupulous man; one in whose bosom no good thing seemed to have been implanted. Your father, when he first knew your mother, had every reason to believe that this man was dead.’

‘And he was not dead?’ Mr. Prendergast could see that the young man’s face became perfectly pale as he uttered these words. He became pale, and clutched hold of the table with his hand, and there sat with mouth open and staring eyes.

‘I am afraid not,’ said Mr. Prendergast; ‘I am afraid not.’

‘And—’

‘I must go further than that, and tell you that he is still living.’

‘Mr. Prendergast, Mr. Prendergast!’ exclaimed the poor fellow, rising up from his chair and shouting out as though for mercy. Mr. Prendergast also rose from his seat, and coming up to him took him by the arm. ‘My dear boy, my dear boy, I am obliged to tell you. It is ne-

cessary that you should know it. The fact is as I say, and it is now for you to show that you are a man.'

Who was ever called upon for a stronger proof of manhood than this? In nine cases out of ten it is not for oneself that one has to be brave. A man, we may almost say, is no man, whose own individual sufferings call for the exercise of much courage. But we are all so mixed up and conjoined with others—with others who are weaker and dearer than ourselves, that great sorrows do require great powers of endurance.

By degrees, as he stood there in silence, the whole truth made its way into his mind,—as he stood there with his arm still tenderly pressed by that old man. No one now would have called the lawyer stern in looking at him, for the tears were coursing down his cheeks. But no tears came to the relief of young Fitzgerald as the truth slowly came upon him, fold by fold, black cloud upon cloud, till the whole horizon of his life's prospect was dark as death. He stood there silent for some few minutes hardly conscious that he was not alone, as he saw all his joys disappearing from before his mind's eye, one by one; his family pride, the pleasant high-toned duties of his station, his promised seat in Parliament and prosperous ambition, the full respect of all the world around him, his wealth and pride of place—for

let no man be credited who boasts that he can part with these without regret. All these were gone. But there were losses more bitter than these. How could he think of his affianced bride? and how could he think of his mother?

No tears came to his relief while the truth, with all its bearings, burnt itself into his very soul, but his face expressed such agony that it was terrible to be seen. Mr. Prendergast could stand that silence no longer, so at last he spoke. He spoke,—for the sake of words; for all his tale had been told.

‘You saw the man that was here yesterday? That was he, who then called himself Talbot.’

‘What! the man that went away in the car? Mollett?’

‘Yes; that was the man.’

Herbert had said that no evidence could be sufficient to make him believe that his mother had been in any way culpable: and such probably was the case. He had that reliance on his mother—that assurance in his mind that everything coming from her must be good—that he could not believe her capable of ill. But, nevertheless, he could not prevent himself from asking within his own breast, how it had been possible that his mother should ever have been concerned with such a wretch as that. It was a question which could not fail to make itself audible. What being

on earth was sweeter than his mother, more excellent, more noble, more fitted for the world's high places, more absolutely entitled to that universal respect which seemed to be given to her as her own by right? And what being could be more loathsome, more contemptible than he, who was, as he was now told, his mother's husband? There was in it a want of verisimilitude which almost gave him comfort,—which almost taught him to think that he might disbelieve the story that was told to him. Poor fellow! he had yet to learn the difference that years may make in men and women—for better as well as for worse. Circumstances had given to the poor half-educated village girl the simple dignity of high station; as circumstances had also brought to the lowest dregs of human existence the man, whose personal bearing, and apparent worldly standing had been held sufficient to give warrant that he was of gentle breeding and of honest standing; nay, her good fortune in such a marriage had once been almost begrudged her by all her maiden neighbours.

But Herbert, as he thought of this, was almost encouraged to disbelieve the story. To him, with his knowledge of what his mother was, and such knowledge as he also had of that man, it did not seem possible. 'But how is all this known?' he muttered forth at last.

‘I fear there is no doubt of its truth,’ said Mr. Prendergast. ‘Your father has no doubt whatever; has had none—I must tell you this plainly—for some months.’

‘For some months! And why have I not been told?’

‘Do not be hard upon your father.’

‘Hard! no; of course I would not be hard upon him.’

‘The burden he has had to bear has been very terrible. He has thought that by payments of money to this man the whole thing might be concealed. As is always the case when such payments are made, the insatiable love of money grew by what it fed on. He would have poured out every shilling into that man’s hands, and would have died, himself a beggar—have died speedily too under such torments—and yet no good would have been done. The harpy would have come upon you; and you—after you had innocently assumed a title that was not your own and taken a property to which you have no right, you then would have had to own—that which your father must own now.’

‘If it be so,’ said Herbert, slowly, ‘it must be acknowledged.’

‘Just so, Mr. Fitzgerald; just so. I know you will feel that—in such matters we can only sail safely by the truth. There is no other compass worth a man’s while to look at.’

‘Of course not;’ said Herbert, with hoarse voice. ‘One does not wish to be a robber and a thief. My cousin shall have what is his own.’ And then he involuntarily thought of the interview they had had on that very day. ‘But why did he not tell me when I spoke to him of her?’ he said, with something approaching to bitterness in his voice and a slight struggle in his throat that was almost premonitory of a sob.

‘Ah! it is there that I fear for you. I know what your feelings are; but think of his sorrows, and do not be hard on him.’

‘Ah me, ah me!’ exclaimed Herbert.

‘I fear that he will not be with you long. He has already endured till he is now almost past the power of suffering more. And yet there is so much more that he must suffer!’

‘My poor father!’

‘Think what such as he must have gone through in bringing himself into contact with that man; and all this has been done that he might spare you and your mother. Think of the wound to his conscience before he would have lowered himself to an unworthy bargain with a swindler. But this has been done that you might have that which you have been taught to look on as your own. He has been wrong. No other verdict can be given. But you, at any rate, can be tender to such a fault; you and your mother.’

‘I will—I will,’ said Herbert. ‘But if it had happened a month since I could have borne it.’ And then he thought of his mother, and hated himself for what he had said. How could he have borne that with patience? ‘And there is no doubt, you say?’

‘I think none. The man carries his proofs with him. An old servant here in the house, too, knows him.’

‘What, Mrs. Jones?’

‘Yes; Mrs. Jones. And the burden of further proof must now, of course, be thrown on us,—not on him. Directly that we believe the statement, it is for us to ascertain its truth. You and your father must not be seen to hold a false position before the world.’

‘And what are we to do now?’

‘I fear that your mother must be told, and Mr. Owen Fitzgerald; and then we must together openly prove the facts, either in one way or in the other. It will be better that we should do this together;—that is you and your cousin Owen conjointly. Do it openly, before the world,—so that the world may know that each of you desires only what is honestly his own. For myself I tell you fairly that I have no doubt of the truth of what I have told you; but further proof is certainly needed. Had I any doubt I would not propose to tell your mother. As it is

I think it will be wrong to keep her longer in the dark.'

'Does she suspect nothing?'

'I do not know. She has more power of self-control than your father. She has not spoken to me ten words since I have been in the house, and in not doing so I have thought that she was right.'

'My own mother; my dear mother!'

'If you ask me my opinion, I think that she does suspect the truth,—very vaguely, with an indefinite feeling that the calamity which weighs so heavily on your father, has come from this source. She, dear lady, is greatly to be pitied. But God has made her of firmer material than your father, and I think that she will bear her sorrow with a higher courage.'

'And she is to be told also?'

'Yes, I think so. I do not see how we can avoid it. If we do not tell her we must attempt to conceal it, and that attempt must needs be futile when we are engaged in making open inquiry on the subject. Your cousin, when he hears of this, will of course be anxious to know what his real prospects are.'

'Yes, yes. He will be anxious, and determined too.'

'And then, when all the world will know it, how is your mother to be kept in the dark?'

And that which she fears and anticipates is as bad, probably, as the actual truth. If my advice be followed nothing will be kept from her.'

'We are in your hands, I suppose, Mr. Prendergast?'

'I can only act as my judgment directs me.'

'And who is to tell her?' This he asked with a shudder, and almost in a whisper. The very idea of undertaking such a duty seemed almost too much for him. And yet he must undertake a duty almost as terrible; he himself—no one but him—must endure the anguish of repeating this story to Clara Desmond and to the countess. But now the question had reference to his own mother. 'And who is to tell her?' he asked.

For a moment or two Mr. Prendergast stood silent. He had not hitherto, in so many words, undertaken this task—this that would be the most dreadful of all. But if he did not undertake it, who would? 'I suppose that I must do it,' at last he said, very gently.

'And when?'

'As soon as I have told your cousin. I will go down to him to-morrow after breakfast. Is it probable that I shall find him at home?'

'Yes, if you are there before ten. The hounds meet to-morrow at Cecilstown, within three miles of him, and he will not leave home till near

eleven. But it is possible that he may have a house full of men with him.'

'At any rate I will try. On such an occasion as this he may surely let his friends go to the hunt without him.'

And then between nine and ten this interview came to an end. 'Mr. Fitzgerald,' said Mr. Prendergast, as he pressed Herbert's hand, 'you have borne all this as a man should do. No loss of fortune can ruin one who is so well able to endure misfortune.' But in this Mr. Prendergast was perhaps mistaken. His knowledge of human nature had not carried him sufficiently far. A man's courage under calamity is only tested when he is left in solitude. The meanest among us can bear up while strange eyes are looking at us. And then Mr. Prendergast went away, and he was alone.

It had been his habit during the whole of this period of his father's illness to go to Sir Thomas at or before bedtime. These visits had usually been made to the study, the room in which he was now standing; but when his father had gone to his bedroom at an earlier hour, Herbert had always seen him there. Was he to go to him now—now that he had heard all this? And if so, how was he to bear himself there, in his father's presence? He stood still, thinking of this, till the hand of the clock showed him that it

was past ten, and then it struck him that his father might be waiting for him. It would not do for him now, at such a moment, to appear wanting in that attention which he had always shown. He was still his father's son, though he had lost the right to bear his father's name. He was nameless now, a man utterly without respect or standing-place in the world, a being whom the law ignored except as the possessor of a mere life; such was he now, instead of one whose rights and privileges, whose property and rank all the statutes of the realm and customs of his country delighted to honour and protect. This he repeated to himself over and over again. It was to such a pass as this, to this bitter disappointment that his father had brought him. But yet it should not be said of him that he had begun to neglect his father as soon as he had heard the story.

So with a weary step he walked up stairs, and found Sir Thomas in bed, with his mother sitting by the bedside. His mother held out her hand to him, and he took it, leaning against the bedside. 'Has Mr. Prendergast left you?' she asked.

He told her that Mr. Prendergast had left him, and gone to his own room for the night. 'And have you been with him all the evening?' she asked. She had no special motive in so asking,

but both the father and the son shuddered at the question. 'Yes,' said Herbert; 'I have been with him, and now I have come to wish my father good night; and you too, mother, if you intend to remain here.' But Lady Fitzgerald got up, telling Herbert that she would leave him with Sir Thomas; and before either of them could hinder her from departing, the father and the son were alone together.

Sir Thomas, when the door closed, looked furtively up into his son's face. Might it be that he could read there how much had been already told, or how much still remained to be disclosed? That Herbert was to learn it all that evening, he knew; but it might be that Mr. Prendergast had failed to perform his task. Sir Thomas in his heart trusted that he had failed. He looked up furtively into Herbert's face, but at the moment there was nothing there that he could read. There was nothing there but black misery; and every face round him for many days past had worn that aspect.

For a minute or two Herbert said nothing, for he had not made up his mind whether or no he would that night disturb his father's rest. But he could not speak in his ordinary voice, or bid his father good-night as though nothing special to him had happened. 'Father,' said he, after a short pause, 'father, I know it all now.'

‘My boy, my poor boy, my unfortunate boy!’
‘Father,’ said Herbert, ‘do not be unhappy about me, I can bear it.’ And then he thought again of his bride—his bride as she was to have been; but nevertheless he repeated his last words, ‘I can bear it, father!’

‘I have meant it for the best, Herbert,’ said the poor man, pleading to his child.

‘I know that; all of us well know that. But what Mr. Prendergast says is true; it is better that it should be known. That man would have killed you had you kept it longer to yourself.’

Sir Thomas hid his face upon the pillow as the remembrance of what he had endured in those meetings came upon him. The blow that had told heaviest was that visit from the son, and the threats which the man had made still rung in his ears—‘When that youngster was born Lady F. was Mrs. M., wasn’t she? My governor could take her away to-morrow, according to the law of the land, couldn’t he now?’ These words, and more such as these, had nearly killed him at the time, and now, as they recurred to him, he burst out into childish tears. Poor man! the days of his manhood had gone, and nothing but the tears of a second bitter childhood remained to him. The hot iron had entered into his soul, and shrivelled up the very muscles of his mind’s strength.

Herbert, without much thought of what he was doing, knelt down by the bedside and put his hand upon that of his father which lay out upon the sheet. There he knelt for one or two minutes, watching and listening to his father's sobs. 'You will be better now, father,' he said, 'for the great weight of this terrible secret will be off your mind.' But Sir Thomas did not answer him. With him there could never be any better. All things belonging to him had gone to ruin. All those around him whom he had loved—and he had loved those around him very dearly—were brought to poverty, and sorrow, and disgrace. The power of feeling this was left to him, but the power of enduring this with manhood was gone. The blow had come upon him too late in life.

And Herbert himself, as he knelt there, could hardly forbear from tears. Now, at such a moment as this, he could think of no one but his father, the author of his being, who lay there so grievously afflicted by sorrows which were in no-wise selfish. 'Father,' he said at last, 'will you pray with me?' And then when the poor sufferer had turned his face towards him, he poured forth his prayer to his Saviour that they all in that family might be enabled to bear the heavy sorrows which God in his mercy and wisdom had now thought fit to lay upon them. I will not make

his words profane by repeating them here, but one may say confidently that they were not uttered in vain.

‘ And now, dearest father, good night,’ he said as he rose from his knees ; and stretching over the bed, he kissed his father’s forehead.

CHAPTER IX.

BEFORE BREAKFAST AT HAP HOUSE.

It may be imagined that Mr. Mollett's drive back to Cork after his last visit to Castle Richmond had not been very pleasant; and indeed it may be said that his present circumstances altogether were as unpleasant as his worst enemies could desire. I have endeavoured to excite the sympathy of those who are going with me through this story for the sufferings of that family of the Fitzgeralds; but how shall I succeed in exciting their sympathy for this other family of the Molletts? And yet why not? If we are to sympathise only with the good, or worse still, only with the graceful, how little will there be in our character that is better than terrestrial? Those Molletts also were human, and had strings to their hearts, at which the world would now probably pull with sufficient vigour. For myself I can truly say that my strongest feeling is for their wretchedness.

The father and son had more than once boasted among themselves that the game they were now

playing was a high one; that they were, in fact, gambling for mighty stakes. And in truth, as long as the money came in to them—flowing in as the result of their own craft in this game—the excitement had about it something that was very pleasurable. There was danger, which makes all games pleasant; there was money in handfuls for daily expenses—those daily wants of the appetite, which are to such men more important by far than the distant necessities of life; there was a possibility of future grandeur, an opening out of magnificent ideas of fortune, which charmed them greatly as they thought about it. What might they not do with forty thousand pounds divided between them, or even with a thousand a year each, settled on them for life? and surely their secret was worth that money! Nay, was it not palpable to the meanest calculation that it was worth much more? Had they not the selling of twelve thousand a year for ever and ever to this family of Fitzgerald?

But for the last fortnight things had begun to go astray with them. Money easily come by goes easily, and money badly come by goes badly. Theirs had come easily and badly, and had so gone. What necessity could there be for economy with such a milch-cow as that close to their elbows? So both of them had thought, if not argued; and there had been no economy—

no economy in the use of that very costly amusement, the dice-box; and now, at the present moment, ready money having failed to be the result of either of the two last visits to Castle Richmond, the family funds were running low.

It may be said that ready money for the moment was the one desire nearest to the heart of Mollett père, when he took that last journey over the Boggeragh mountains—ready money wherewith to satisfy the pressing claims of Miss O'Dwyer, and bring back civility, or rather servility, to the face and manner of Tom the waiter at the Kanturk Hotel. Very little of that servility can be enjoyed by persons of the Mollett class when money ceases to be ready in their hands and pockets, and there is, perhaps, nothing that they enjoy so keenly as servility. Mollett père had gone down determined that that comfort should at any rate be forthcoming to him, whatever answer might be given to those other grander demands, and we know what success had attended his mission. He had looked to find his tame milch-cow trembling in her accustomed stall, and he had found a resolute bull there in her place—a bull whom he could by no means take by the horns. He had got no money, and before he had reached Cork he had begun to comprehend that it was not probable that he should get more from that source.

During a part of the interview between him

and Mr. Prendergast, some spark of mercy towards his victims had glimmered into his heart. When it was explained to him that the game was to be given up, that the family at Castle Richmond was prepared to acknowledge the truth, and that the effort made was with the view of proving that the poor lady up stairs was not entitled to the name she bore rather than that she was so entitled, then some slight promptings of a better spirit did for a while tempt him to be merciful. 'Oh, what are you about to do?' he would have said had Mr. Prendergast admitted of speech from him. 'Why make this terrible sacrifice? Matters have not come to that. There is no need for you to drag to the light this terrible fact. I will not divulge it—no not although you are hard upon me in regard to these terms of mine. I will still keep it to myself, and trust to you,—to you who are all so rich and able to pay, for what consideration you may please to give me.' This was the state of his mind when Mrs. Jones's evidence was being slowly evoked from her; but it had undergone a considerable change before he reached Cork. By that time he had taught himself to understand that there was no longer a chance to him of any consideration whatever. Slowly he had brought it home to himself that these people had resolutely determined to blow up the ground on which they

themselves stood. This he perceived was their honesty. He did not understand the nature of a feeling which could induce so fatal a suicide, but he did understand that the feeling was there, and that the suicide would be completed.

And now what was he to do next in the way of earning his bread? Various thoughts ran through his brain, and different resolves—half-formed but still, perhaps, capable of shape—presented themselves to him for the future. It was still on the cards—on the cards, but barely so—that he might make money out of these people; but he must wait perhaps for weeks before he again commenced such an attempt. He might perhaps make money out of them, and be merciful to them at the same time;—not money by thousands and tens of thousands; that golden dream was gone for ever; but still money that might be comfortably luxurious as long as it could be made to last. But then on one special point he made a firm and final resolution,—whatever new scheme he might hatch he alone would manage. Never again would he call into his councils that son of his loins whose rapacious greed had, as he felt sure, brought upon him all this ruin. Had Aby not gone to Castle Richmond, with his cruelty and his greed, frightening to the very death the soul of that poor baronet by the enormity of his demands, Mr. Prendergast

would not have been there. Of what further chance of Castle Richmond pickings there might be Aby should know nothing. He and his son would no longer hunt in couples. He would shake him off in that escape which they must both now make from Cork, and he would not care how long it might be before he again saw his countenance.

But then that question of ready money; and that other question, perhaps as interesting, touching a criminal prosecution! How was he to escape if he could not raise the wind? And how could he raise the wind now that his milch-cow had run so dry? He had promised the O'Dwyers money that evening, and had struggled hard to make that promise with an easy face. He now had none to give them. His orders at the inn were treated almost with contempt. For the last three days they had given him what he wanted to eat and drink, but would hardly give him all that he wanted. When he called for brandy they brought him whisky, and it had only been by hard begging, and by oaths as to the promised money, that he had induced them to supply him with the car which had taken him on his fruitless journey to Castle Richmond. As he was driven up to the door in South Main Street, his heart was very sad on all these subjects.

Aby was again sitting within the bar, but was no longer basking in the sunshine of Fanny's smiles. He was sitting there because Fanny had not yet mustered courage to turn him out. He was half-drunk, for it had been found impossible to keep spirits from him. And there had been hot words between him and Fanny, in which she had twitted him with his unpaid bill, and he had twitted her with her former love. And things had gone from bad to worse, and she had all but called in Tom for aid in getting quit of him; she had, however, refrained, thinking of the money that might be coming, and waiting also till her father should arrive. Fanny's love for Mr. Abraham Mollett had not been long lived.

I will not describe another scene such as those which had of late been frequent in the Kanturk Hotel. The father and the son soon found themselves together in the small room in which they now both slept, at the top of the house; and Aby, tipsy as he was, understood the whole of what had happened at Castle Richmond. When he heard that Mr. Prendergast was seen in that room in lieu of Sir Thomas, he knew at once that the game had been abandoned. 'But something may yet be done at 'Appy 'ouse,' Aby said to himself, 'only one must be deuced quick.'

The father and the son of course quarrelled frightfully, like dogs over the memory of a bone

which had been arrested from the jaws of both of them. Aby said that his father had lost everything by his pusillanimity, and old Mollett declared that his son had destroyed all by his rashness. But we need not repeat their quarrels, nor repeat all that passed between them and Tom before food was forthcoming to satisfy the old man's wants. As he ate he calculated how much he might probably raise upon his watch towards taking him to London, and how best he might get off from Cork without leaving any scent in the nostrils of his son. His clothes he must leave behind him at the inn, at least all that he could not pack upon his person. Lately he had made himself comfortable in this respect, and he sorrowed over the fine linen which he had worn but once or twice since it had been bought with the last instalment from Sir Thomas. Nevertheless in this way he did make up his mind for the morrow's campaign.

And Aby also made up his mind. Something at any rate he had learned from Fanny O'Dwyer in return for his honeyed words. When Herbert Fitzgerald should cease to be the heir to Castle Richmond, Owen Fitzgerald of Hap House would be the happy man. That knowledge was his own in absolute independence of his father, and there might still be time for him to use it. He knew well the locality of Hap House, and he

would be there early on the following morning. These tidings had probably not as yet reached the owner of that blessed abode, and if he could be the first to tell him——! The game there too might be pretty enough, if it were played well, by such a master-hand as his own. Yes; he would be at Hap House early in the morning;—but then, how to get there?

He left his father preparing for bed, and going down into the bar found Mr. O'Dwyer and his daughter there in close consultation. They were endeavouring to arrive, by their joint wisdom, at some conclusion as to what they should do with their two guests. Fanny was for turning them out at once. 'The first loss is the least,' said she. 'And they is so disrispectable. I niver know what they're afther, and always is expecting the p'lice will be down on them.' But the father shook his head. He had done nothing wrong; the police could not hurt him; and thirty pounds, as he told his daughter, with much emphasis, was 'a deuced sight of money.' 'The first loss is the least,' said Fanny, perseveringly; and then Aby entered to them.

'My father has made a mull of this matter again,' said he, going at once into the middle of the subject. 'E'as come back without a shiner.'

'I'll be bound he has,' said Mr. O'Dwyer, sarcastically.

‘And that when e’d only got to go two or three miles further, and hall his troubles would have been over.’

‘Troubles over, would they?’ said Fanny. ‘I wish he’d have the goodness to get over his little troubles in this house, by paying us our bill. You’ll have to walk if it’s not done, and that to-morrow, Mr. Mollett; and so I tell you; and take nothing with you, I can tell you. Father ’ll have the police to see to that.’

‘Don’t you be so cruel now, Miss Fanny,’ said Aby, with a leering look. ‘I tell you what it is, Mr. O’Dwyer, I must go down again to them diggings very early to-morrow, starting, say, at four o’clock.’

‘You’ll not have a foot out of my stables,’ said Mr. O’Dwyer. ‘That’s all.’

‘Look here, Mr. O’Dwyer; there’s been a sight of money due to us from those Fitzgerald people down there. You knqw ’em; and whether they’re hable to pay or not. I won’t deny but what father’s ’ad the best of it,—’ad the best of it, and sent it trolling, bad luck to him. But there’s no good looking hafter spilt milk; is there?’

‘If so be that Sir Thomas owed the likes of you money, he would have paid it without your tramping down there time after time to look for it. He’s not one of that sort.’

‘No, indeed,’ said Fanny; ‘and I don’t believe anything about your seeing Sir Thomas.’

'Oh, we've seed him hoften enough. There's no mistake about that. But now——' and then, with a mysterious air and low voice, he explained to them, that this considerable balance of money still due to them was to be paid by the cousin, 'Mr. Owen of Appy 'ouse.' And to substantiate all his story, he exhibited a letter from Mr. Prendergast to his father, which some months since had intimated that a sum of money would be paid on behalf of Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, if Mr. Mollett would call at Mr. Prendergast's office at a certain hour. The ultimate effect of all this was, that the car was granted for the morning, with certain dire threats as to any further breach of engagement.

Very early on the following morning Aby was astir, hoping that he might manage to complete his not elaborate toilet without disturbing his father's slumbers. For, it must be known, he had been very urgent with the O'Dwyers as to the necessity of keeping this journey of his a secret from his 'governor.' But the governor was wide awake, looking at him out of the corner of his closed eye whenever his back was turned, and not caring much what he was about to do with himself. Mollett père wished to be left alone for that morning, that he also might play his little game in his own solitary fashion, and was not at all disposed to question the movements of his son.

At about five Aby started for Hap House. His toilet, I have said, was not elaborate; but in this I have perhaps wronged him. Up there in the bed-room he did not waste much time over his soap and water; but he was aware that first impressions are everything, and that one young man should appear smart and clever before another if he wished to carry any effect with him; so he took his brush and comb in his pocket, and a pot of grease with which he was wont to polish his long side-locks, and he hurriedly grasped up his pins, and his rings, and the satin stock which Fanny in her kinder mood had folded for him; and then, during his long journey to Hap House, he did perform a toilet which may, perhaps, be fairly called elaborate.

There was a long, tortuous, narrow avenue, going from the Mallow and Kanturk road down to Hap House, which impressed Aby with the idea that the man on whom he was now about to call was also a big gentleman, and made him more uneasy than he would have been had he entered a place with less pretence. There is a story current, that in the west of England the grandeur of middle-aged maiden ladies is measured by the length of the tail of their cats; and Aby had a perhaps equally correct idea, that the length of the private drive up to a gentleman's house, was a fair criterion of the splendour of his position.

If this man had about him as much grandeur as Sir Thomas himself, would he be so anxious as Aby had hoped to obtain the additional grandeur of Sir Thomas? It was in that direction that his mind was operating when he got down from the car and rang at the door-bell.

Mr. Owen, as everybody called him, was at home, but not down; and so Aby was shown into the dining-room. It was now considerably past nine; and the servant told him that his master must be there soon, as he had to eat his breakfast and be at the hunt by eleven. The servant at Hap House was more unsophisticated than those at Castle Richmond, and Aby's personal adornments had had their effect. He found himself sitting in the room with the cups and saucers,—aye, and with the silver tea-spoons; and began again to trust that his mission might be successful.

And then the door opened, and a man appeared, clad from top to toe in hunting costume. This was not Owen Fitzgerald, but his friend Captain Donnellan. As it had happened, Captain Donnellan was the only guest who had graced the festivities of Hap House on the previous evening; and now he appeared at the breakfast table before his host. Aby got up from his chair when the gentleman entered, and was proceeding to business; but the Captain gave him to under-

stand that the master of the house was not yet in presence, and so Aby sat down again. What was he to do when the master did arrive? His story was not one which would well bear telling before a third person.

And then, while Captain Donnellan was scanning this visitor to his friend Owen, and bethinking himself whether he might not be a sheriff's officer, and whether if so some notice ought not to be conveyed up stairs to the master of the house, another car was driven up to the front door. In this case the arrival was from Castle Richmond, and the two servants knew each other well. 'Thady,' said Richard, with much authority in his voice, 'this gentl'man is Mr. Prendergast from our place, and he must see the masther before he goes to the hunt.' 'Faix and the masther 'll have something to do this blessed morning,' said Thady, as he showed Mr. Prendergast also into the dining-room, and went up stairs to inform his master that there was yet another gentleman come upon business. 'The Captain has got 'em both to hisself,' said Thady, as he closed the door.

The name of Mr. 'Pendhrergrast,' as the Irish servants generally called him, was quite unknown to the owner of Hap House, as was also that of Mr. Mollett, which had been brought up to him the first of the two; but Owen began to think that

there must be something very unusual in a day so singularly ushered in to him. Callers at Hap House on business were very few, unless when tradesmen in want of money occasionally dropped in upon him. But now that he was so summoned Owen began to bestir himself with his boots and breeches. A gentleman's costume for a hunting morning is always a slow one—sometimes so slow and tedious as to make him think of forswearing such articles of dress for all future ages. But now he did bestir himself,—in a moody melancholy sort of manner; for his manner in all things latterly had become moody and melancholy.

In the mean time Captain Donnellan and the two strangers sat almost in silence in the dining-room. The Captain, though he did not perhaps know much of things noticeable in this world, did know something of a gentleman, and was therefore not led away, as poor Thady had been, by Aby's hat and rings. He had stared Aby full in the face when he entered the room, and having explained that he was not the master of the house, had not vouchsafed another word. But then he had also seen that Mr. Prendergast was of a different class, and had said a civil word or two, asking him to come near the fire, and suggesting that Owen would be down in less than five minutes. 'But the old cock wouldn't crow,' as he afterwards remarked to his friend, and so they

all three sat in silence, the Captain being very busy about his knees, as hunting gentlemen sometimes are when they come down to bachelor breakfasts.

And then at last Owen Fitzgerald entered the room. He has been described as a handsome man, but in no dress did he look so well as when equipped for a day's sport. And what dress that Englishman ever wear is so handsome as this? Or we may perhaps say what other dress does English custom allow them that is in any respect not the reverse of handsome. We have come to be so dingy,—in our taste I was going to say, but it is rather in our want of taste,—so careless of any of the laws of beauty in the folds and lines and hues of our dress, so opposed to grace in the arrangement of our persons, that it is not permitted to the ordinary English gentleman to be anything else but ugly. Chimney-pot hats, swallow-tailed coats, and pantaloons that fit nothing, came creeping in upon us, one after the other, while the Georges reigned—creeping in upon us with such pictures as we painted under the reign of West, and such houses as we built under the reign of Nash, till the English eye required to rest on that which was constrained, dull, and graceless. For the last two score of years it has come to this, that if a man go in handsome attire he is a popinjay and a vain fool; and as it is better to be ugly

than to be accounted vain I would not counsel a young friend to leave the beaten track on the strength of his own judgment. But not the less is the beaten track to be condemned, and abandoned, and abolished, if such be in any way possible. Beauty is good in all things ; and I cannot but think that those old Venetian senators, and Florentine men of Council, owed somewhat of their country's pride and power to the manner in which they clipped their beards and wore their flowing garments.

But an Englishman may still make himself brave when he goes forth into the hunting field. Custom there allows him colour, and garments that fit his limbs. Strength is the outward characteristic of manhood, and at the covert-side he may appear strong. Look at men as they walk along Fleet-street, and ask yourself whether any outward sign of manhood or strength can be seen there. And of gentle manhood outward dignity should be the trade mark. I will not say that such outward dignity is incompatible with a black hat and plaid trousers, for the eye instructed by habit will search out dignity for itself wherever it may truly exist, let it be hidden by what vile covering it may. But any man who can look well at his club, will look better as he clusters round the hounds ; while many a one who is comely there, is mean enough as he stands on the hearth-rug before his club fire. In my mind men,

like churches and books, and women too, should be brave, not mean, in their outward garniture.

And Owen, as I have said, was brave as he walked into his dining-room. The sorrow which weighed on his heart had not wrinkled his brow, but had given him a set dignity of purpose. His tall figure, which his present dress allowed to be seen, was perfect in its symmetry of strength. His bright chestnut hair clustered round his forehead, and his eye shone like that of a hawk. They must have been wrong who said that he commonly spent his nights over the wine-cup. That pleasure always leaves its disgusting traces round the lips; and Owen Fitzgerald's lips were as full and lusty as Apollo's. Mollett, as he saw him, was stricken with envy. 'If I could only get enough money out of this affair to look like that,' was his first thought, as his eye fell on the future heir; not understanding, poor wretch that he was, that all the gold of California could not bring him one inch nearer to the goal he aimed at. I think I have said before, that your silk purse will not get itself made out of that coarse material with which there are so many attempts to manufacture that article. And Mr. Prendergast rose from his chair when he saw him, with a respect that was almost involuntary. He had not heard men speak well of Owen Fitzgerald;—not that ill-natured things had been said by the

family at Castle Richmond, but circumstances had prevented the possibility of their praising him. If a relative or friend be spoken of without praise, he is, in fact, censured. From what he had heard he had certainly not expected a man who would look so noble as did the owner of Hap House, who now came forward to ask him his business.

Both Mr. Prendergast and Aby Mollett rose at the same time. Since the arrival of the latter gentleman, Aby had been wondering who he might be, but no idea that he was that lawyer from Castle Richmond had entered his head. That he was a stranger like himself, Aby saw ; but he did not connect him with his own business. Indeed he had not yet realized the belief, though his father had done so, that the truth would be revealed by those at Castle Richmond to him at Hap House. His object now was that the old gentleman should say his say and begone, leaving him to dispose of the other young man in the top-boots as best he might. But then, as it happened, that was also Mr. Prendergast's line of action.

'Gentlemen,' said Owen, 'I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting ; but the fact is that I am so seldom honoured in this way in a morning, that I was hardly ready. Donnellan, there's the tea ; don't mind waiting. These gentlemen will

perhaps join us.' And then he looked hard at Aby, as though he trusted in Providence that no such profanation would be done to his tablecloth.

'Thank you, I have breakfasted,' said Mr. Prendergast.

'And so 'ave I,' said Aby, who had eaten a penny loaf in the car, and would have been delighted to sit down at that rich table. But he was a little beside himself, and not able to pluck up courage for such an effort.

'I don't know whether you two gentlemen have come about the same business,' said Owen, looking from one to the other.

'No,' said Mr. Prendergast, very confidently, but not very correctly. 'I wish to speak to you, Mr. Fitzgerald, for a few minutes : but my business with you is quite private.'

'So is mine,' said Aby, 'very private ; very private indeed.'

'Well, gentlemen, I have just half-an-hour in which to eat my breakfast, attend to business, get on my horse and leave the house. Out of that twenty-five minutes are very much at your service. Donnellan, I beg your pardon. Do pitch into the broiled bones while they are hot ; never mind me. And now, gentlemen, if you will walk with me into the other room. First come first served : that I suppose should be the

order.' And he opened the door and stood with it ajar in his hand.

'I will wait, Mr. Fitzgerald, if you please,' said Mr. Prendergast; and as he spoke he motioned Mollett with his hand to go to the door.

'Oh! I can wait, sir; I'd rather wait, sir. I would indeed,' said Aby, 'My business is a little particular; and if you'll go on, sir, I'll take up with the gen'leman as soon as you've done, sir.'

But Mr. Prendergast was accustomed to have his own way. 'I should prefer that you should go first, sir.' And to tell the truth, Mr. Fitzgerald, what I have to say to you will take some time. It is of much importance, to yourself and to others; and I fear that you will probably find that it will detain you from your amusement to-day.'

Owen looked black as he heard this. The hounds were going to draw a covert of his own; and he was not in the habit of remaining away from the drawing of any coverts, belonging to himself or others, on any provocation whatever. 'That will be rather hard,' said he, 'considering that I do not know any more than the man in the moon what you've come about.'

'You shall be the sole judge yourself, sir, of the importance of my business with you,' said Mr. Prendergast.

‘Well, Mr. —— I forget your name,’ said Owen.

‘My name’s Mollett,’ said Aby. Whereupon Mr. Prendergast looked up at him very sharply, but he said nothing.—He said nothing, but he looked very sharply indeed. He now knew well who this man was, and guessed with tolerable accuracy the cause of his visit. But, nevertheless, at the moment he said nothing.

‘Come along, then, Mr. Mollett. I hope your affair is not likely to be a very long one also. Perhaps you’ll excuse my having a cup of tea sent into me as you talk to me. There is nothing like saving time when such very important business is on the tapis. Donnellan, send Thady in with a cup of tea, like a good fellow. Now, Mr. Mollett.’

Mr. Mollett rose slowly from his chair, and followed his host. He would have given all he possessed in the world, and that was very little, to have had the coast clear. But in such an emergency, what was he to do? By the time he had reached the door of the drawing-room, he had all but made up his mind to tell Fitzgerald that, seeing there was so much other business on hand this morning at Hap House, this special piece of business of his must stand over. But then, how could he go back to Cork empty-handed? So he followed Owen into the room, and there opened

his budget with what courage he had left to him.

Captain Donnellan as he employed himself on the broiled bones, twice invited Mr. Prendergast to assist him ; but in vain. Donnellan remained there, waiting for Owen, till eleven ; and then got on his horse. 'You'll tell Fitzgerald, will you, that I've started? He'll see nothing of to-day's hunt ; that's clear.'

'I don't think he will,' said Mr. Prendergast.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER BREAKFAST AT HAP HOUSE.

‘I DON’T think he will,’ said Mr. Prendergast; and as he spoke, Captain Donnellan’s ear could detect that there was something approaching to sarcasm in the tone of the old man’s voice. The Captain was quite sure that his friend would not be even at the heel of the hunt that day; and without further compunction proceeded to fasten his buckskin gloves round his wrists. The meet was so near to them, that they had both intended to ride their own hunters from the door; and the two nags were now being led up and down upon the gravel.

But at this moment a terrible noise was heard to take place in the hall. There was a rush and crushing there which made even Mr. Prendergast to jump from his chair, and drove Captain Donnellan to forget his gloves and run to the door.

It was as though all the winds of heaven were being driven down the passage, and as though

each separate wind was shod with heavy-heeled boots. Captain Donnellan ran to the door, and Mr. Prendergast with slower steps followed him. When it was opened, Owen was to be seen in the hall, apparently in a state of great excitement; and the gentleman whom he had lately asked to breakfast,—he was to be seen also, in a position of unmistakeable discomfort. He was at that moment proceeding, with the utmost violence, into a large round bed of bushes, which stood in the middle of the great sweep before the door of the house, his feet just touching the ground as he went; and then, having reached his bourne, he penetrated face foremost into the thicket, and in an instant disappeared. He had been kicked out of the house. Owen Fitzgerald had taken him by the shoulders, with a run along the passage and hall, and having reached the door, had applied the flat of his foot violently to poor Aby's back, and sent him flying down the stone steps. And now, as Captain Donnellan and Mr. Prendergast stood looking on, Mr. Mollett junior buried himself altogether out of sight among the shrubs.

'You have done for that fellow, at any rate, Owen,' said Captain Donnellan, glancing for a moment at Mr. Prendergast. 'I should say that he will never get out of that alive.'

'Not if he wait till I pick him out,' said Owen, breathing very hard after his exertion. 'An

infernal scoundrel! And now, Mr. Prendergast, if you are ready, sir, I am.' It was as much as he could do to finish these few words with that sang froid which he desired to assume, so violent was his attempt at breathing after his late exercise.

It was impossible not to conceive the idea that, as one disagreeable visitor had been disposed of in a somewhat summary fashion, so might be the other also. Mr. Prendergast did not look like a man who was in the habit of leaving gentlemen's houses in the manner just now adopted by Mr. Mollett; but nevertheless, as they had come together, both unwished for and unwelcome, Captain Donnellan did for a moment bethink himself whether there might not be more of such fun, if he remained there on the spot. At any rate, it would not do for him to go to the hunt while such deeds as these were being done. It might be that his assistance would be wanted.

Mr. Prendergast smiled, with a saturnine and somewhat bitter smile—the nearest approach to a laugh in which he was known to indulge,—for the same notion came also into his head. 'He has disposed of him, and now he is thinking how he will dispose of me.' Such was Mr. Prendergast's thought about the matter; and that made him smile. And then, too, he was pleased at what he had seen. That this Mollett was the son

of that other Mollett, with whom he had been closeted at Castle Richmond, was plain enough; it was plain enough also to him, used as he was to trace out in his mind the courses of action which men would follow, that Mollett junior, having heard of his father's calamitous failure at Castle Richmond, had come down to Hap House to see what he could make out of the hitherto unconscious heir. It had been matter of great doubt with Mr. Prendergast, when he first heard young Mollett's name mentioned, whether or no he would allow him to make his attempt. He, Mr. Prendergast, could by a word have spoilt the game; but acting, as he was forced to act, on the spur of the moment, he resolved to permit Mr. Mollett junior to play out his play. He would be 'yet in time to prevent any ill result to Mr. Fitzgerald, should that gentleman be weak enough to succumb to any such ill results. As things had now turned out Mr. Prendergast rejoiced that Mr. Mollett junior had been permitted to play out his play. 'And now, Mr. Prendergast, if you are ready, I am,' said Owen.

'Perhaps we had better first pick up the gentleman among the trees,' said Mr. Prendergast. And he and Captain Donnellan went down into the bushes.

'Do as you please about that,' said Owen. 'I have touched him once and shall not touch him

again.' And he walked back into the dining-room.

One of the grooms who were leading the horses had now gone to the assistance of the fallen hero; and as Captain Donnellan also had already penetrated as far as Aby's shoulders, Mr. Prendergast, thinking that he was not needed, returned also to the house. 'I hope he is not seriously hurt,' he said.

'Not he,' said Owen. 'Those sort of men are as used to be kicked, as girls are to be kissed; and it comes as naturally to them. But anything short of having his bones broken will be less than he deserves.'

'May I ask what was the nature of his offence?'

Owen remained silent for a moment, looking his guest full in the face. 'Well; not exactly,' said he. 'He has been talking of people of whom he knows nothing, but it would not be well for me to repeat what he has said to a perfect stranger.'

'Quite right, Mr. Fitzgerald; it would not be well. But there can be no harm in my repeating it to you. He came here to get money from you for certain tidings which he brought; tidings which if true would be of great importance to you. As I take it, however, he has altogether failed in his object.'

'And how do you come to know all this, sir?'

'Merely from having heard that man mention

his own name. I also have come with the same tidings; and as I ask for no money for communicating them, you may believe them to be true on my telling.'

'What tidings?' asked Owen, with a frown, and an angry jerk in his voice. No remotest notion had yet come in upon his mind that there was any truth in the story that had been told him. He had looked upon it all as a lie, and had regarded Mollett as a sorry knave who had come to him with a poor and low attempt at raising a few pounds. And even now he did not believe. Mr. Prendergast's words had been too sudden to produce belief of so great a fact, and his first thought was that an endeavour was being made to fool him.

'Those tidings which that man has told you,' said Mr. Prendergast, solemnly. 'That you should not have believed them from him shows only your discretion. But from me you may believe them. I have come from Castle Richmond, and am here as a messenger from Sir Thomas,—from Sir Thomas and from his son. When the matter became clear to them both, then it was felt that you also should be made acquainted with it.'

Owen Fitzgerald now sat down, and looked up into the lawyer's face, staring at him. I may say that the power of saying much was for the moment taken away from him by the words that

he heard. What! was it really possible that that title, that property, that place of honour in the country was to be his when one frail old man should drop away? And then again was it really true that all this immeasurable misery was to fall—had fallen—upon that family whom he had once known so well? It was but yesterday that he had been threatening all manner of evil to his cousin Herbert; and had his threats been proved true so quickly? But there was no shadow of triumph in his feelings. Owen Fitzgerald was a man of many faults. He was reckless, passionate, prone to depreciate the opinion of others, extravagant in his thoughts and habits, ever ready to fight, both morally and physically, those who did not at a moment's notice agree with him. He was a man who would at once make up his mind that the world was wrong when the world condemned him, and who would not in compliance with any argument allow himself to be so. But he was not avaricious, nor cruel, nor self-seeking, nor vindictive. In his anger he could pronounce all manner of ill things against his enemy, as he had pronounced some ill things against Herbert; but it was not in him to keep up a sustained wish that those ill things should really come to pass. This news which he now heard, and which he did not yet fully credit, struck him with awe, but created no triumph in his bosom. He realized the cata-

strophe as it affected his cousins of Castle Richmond rather than as it affected himself.

‘Do you mean to say that Lady Fitzgerald—’ and then he stopped himself. He had not the courage to ask the question which was in his mind. Could it really be the case that Lady Fitzgerald,—that she whom all the world had so long honoured under that name, was in truth the wife of that man’s father,—of the father of that wretch whom he had just spurned from his house? The tragedy was so deep that he could not believe in it.

‘We fear that it is so, Mr. Fitzgerald,’ said Mr. Prendergast. ‘That it certainly is so I cannot say. And therefore, if I may take the liberty to give you counsel, I would advise you not to make too certain of this change in your prospects.’

‘Too certain!’ said he, with a bitter laugh. ‘Do you suppose then that I would wish to see all this ruin accomplished? Heavens and earth! Lady Fitzgerald—! I cannot believe it.’

And then Captain Donnellan also returned to the room. ‘Fitzgerald,’ said he, ‘what the mischief are we to do with this fellow? He says that he can’t walk, and he bleeds from his face like a pig.’

‘What fellow? Oh, do what you like with him. Here: give him a pound note, and let him

go to the d——. And Donnellan, for heaven's sake go to Cecilstown at once. Do not wait for me. I have business that will keep me here all day.'

'But I do not know what to do with this fellow that's bleeding,' said the captain, piteously, as he took the proffered note. 'If he puts up with a pound note for what you've done to him, he's softer than what I take him for.'

'He will be very glad to be allowed to escape without being given up to the police,' said Mr. Prendergast.

'But I don't know what to do with him,' said Captain Donnellan. 'He says that he can't stand.'

'Then lay him down on the dunghill,' said Owen Fitzgerald; 'but for heaven's sake do not let him interrupt me. And, Donnellan, you will altogether lose the day if you stay any longer.' Whereupon the captain, seeing that in very truth he was not wanted, did take himself off, casting as he went one farewell look on Aby as he lay groaning on the turf on the far side of the tuft of bushes.

'He's kilt intirely, I'm thinking, yer honor,' said Thady, who was standing over him on the other side.

'He'll come to life again before dinner-time,' said the Captain.

'Oh, in course he'll do that, yer honor,' said Thady; and then added sotto voce, to himself, as the captain rode down the avenue, 'Faix, an' I don't know about that. Shure an' it's the masther has a heavy hand.' And then Thady stood for a while perplexed, endeavouring to re-animate Aby by a sight of the pound note which he held out visibly between his thumb and fingers.

And now Mr. Prendergast and Owen were again alone. 'And what am I to do?' said Owen, after a pause of a minute or two; and he asked the question with a serious solemn voice.

'Just for the present—for the next day or two—I think that you should do nothing. As soon as the first agony of this time is over at Castle Richmond, I think that Herbert should see you. It would be very desirable that he and you should take in concert such proceedings as will certainly become necessary. The absolute proof of the truth of this story must be obtained. You understand, I hope, Mr. Fitzgerald, that the case still admits of doubt.'

Owen nodded his head impatiently, as though it were needless on the part of Mr. Prendergast to insist upon this. He did not wish to take it for true a moment sooner than was necessary.

'It is my duty to give you this caution. Many lawyers—I presume you know that I am a lawyer—'

'I did not know it,' said Owen; 'but it makes no difference.'

'Thank you; that's very kind,' said Mr. Prendergast; but the sarcasm was altogether lost upon his hearer. 'Some lawyers, as I was saying, would in such a case have advised their clients to keep all their suspicions, nay all their knowledge, to themselves. Why play the game of an adversary? they would ask. But I have thought it better that we should have no adversary.'

'And you will have none,' said Owen; 'none in me at least.'

'I am much gratified in so perceiving, and in having such evidence that my advice has not been indiscreet. It occurred to me that if you received the first intimation of these circumstances from other sources, you would be bound on your own behalf to employ an agent to look after your own interests.'

'I should have done nothing of the kind,' said Owen.

'Ah, but, my dear young friend, in such a case it would have been your duty to do so.'

'Then I should have neglected my duty. And do you tell Herbert this from me, that let the

truth be what it may, I shall never interrupt him in his title or his property. It is not there that I shall look either for justice or revenge. He will understand what I mean.'

But Mr. Prendergast did not, by any means ; nor did he enter into the tone of Owen Fitzgerald's mind. They were both just men, but just in an essentially different manner. The justice of Mr. Prendergast had come of thought and education. As a young man, when entering on his profession, he was probably less just than he was now. He had thought about matters of law and equity, till thought had shown to him the beauty of equity as it should be practised, —often by the aid of law, and not unfrequently in spite of law. Such was the justice of Mr. Prendergast. That of Owen Fitzgerald had come of impulse and nature, and was the justice of a very young man rather than of a very wise one. That title and property did not, as he felt, of justice belong to him, but to his cousin. What difference could it make in the true justice of things, whether or no that wretched man was still alive whom all the world had regarded as dead? In justice he ought to be dead. Now that this calamity of the man's life had fallen upon Sir Thomas and Lady Fitzgerald and his cousin Herbert, it would not be for him to aggravate it by seizing upon a heritage which might

possibly accrue to him under the letter of the world's law, but which could not accrue to him under heaven's law. Such was the justice of Owen Fitzgerald; and we may say this of it in its dispraise, as comparing it with that other justice, that whereas that of Mr. Prendergast would wear for ever, through ages and ages, that other justice of Owen's would hardly have stood the pull of a ten years' struggle. When children came to him, would he not have thought of what might have been theirs by right; and then have thought of what ought to be theirs by right; and so on?

But in speaking of justice, he had also spoken of revenge, and Mr. Prendergast was altogether in the dark. What revenge? He did not know that poor Owen had lost a love, and that Herbert had found it. In the midst of all the confused thoughts which this astounding intelligence had brought upon him, Owen still thought of his love. There Herbert had robbed him—robbed him by means of his wealth; and in that matter he desired justice—justice or revenge. He wanted back his love. Let him have that and Herbert might yet be welcome to his title and estates.

Mr. Prendergast remained there for some half-hour longer, explaining what ought to be done, and how it ought to be done. Of course he

combated that idea of Owen's, that the property might be allowed to remain in the hands of the wrong heir. Had that been consonant with his ideas of justice he would not have made his visit to Hap House this morning. Right must have its way, and if it should be that Lady Fitzgerald's marriage with Sir Thomas had not been legal, Owen, on Sir Thomas's death, must become Sir Owen, and Herbert could not become Sir Herbert. So much to the mind of Mr. Prendergast was as clear as crystal. Let justice be done, even though these Castle Richmond heavens should fall in ruins.

And then he took his departure, leaving Owen to his solitude, much perplexed. 'And where is that man?' Mr. Prendergast asked, as he got on to his car.

'Bedad thin, yer honer, he's very bad intirely. He's jist sitthing over the kitchen fire, moaning and croning this way and that, but sorrow a word he's spoke since the masther hoisted him out o' the big hall door. And thin for blood—why, saving yer honer's presence, he's one mash of gore.'

'You'd better wash his face for him, and give him a little tea,' said Mr. Prendergast, and then he drove away.

And strange ideas floated across Owen Fitzgerald's brain as he sat there alone, in his hunting gear, leaning on the still covered breakfast-

table. They floated across his brain backwards and forwards, and at last remained there, taking almost the form of a definite purpose. He would make a bargain with Herbert; let each of them keep that which was fairly his own; let Herbert have all the broad lands of Castle Richmond; let him have the title, the seat in parliament, and the county honour; but for him, Owen—let him have Clara Desmond. He desired nothing that was not fairly his own; but as his own he did regard her, and without her he did not know how to face the future of his life. And in suggesting this arrangement to himself, he did not altogether throw over her feelings; he did take into account her heart, though he did not take into account her worldly prospects. She had loved him—him—Owen; and he would not teach himself to believe that she did not love him still. Her mother had been too powerful for her, and she had weakly yielded; but as to her heart—Owen could not bring himself to believe that that was gone from him.

They two would make a bargain,—he and his cousin. Honour and renown, and the money and the title would be everything to his cousin. Herbert had been brought up to expect these things, and all the world around him had expected them for him. It would be terrible to him to find himself robbed of them. But the

loss of Clara Desmond was equally terrible to Owen Fitzgerald. He allowed his heart to fill itself with a romantic sense of honour, teaching him that it behoved him as a man not to give up his love. Without her he would live disgraced in his own estimation; but who would not think the better of him for refraining from the possession of those Castle Richmond acres? Yes; he would make a bargain with Herbert. Who was there in the world to deny his right to do so?

As he sat revolving these things in his mind, he suddenly heard a rushing sound, as of many horsemen down the avenue, and going to the window, he saw two or three leading men of the hunt, accompanied by the gray-haired old huntsman; and through and about and under the horsemen were the dogs, running in and out of the laurels which skirted the road, with their noses down, giving every now and then short yelps as they caught up the uncertain scent from the leaves on the ground, and hurried on upon the trail of their game.

‘Yo ho! to him, Messenger; hark to him, Maybird; good bitch, Merrylass. He’s down here, gen’lemen, and he’ll never get away alive. He came to a bad place when he looked out for going to ground anywhere near Mr. Owen.’

And then there came, fast trotting down through the other horsemen, making his way

eagerly to the front, a stout heavy man, with a florid handsome face and eager eye. He might be some fifty years of age, but no lad there of three-and-twenty was so anxious and impetuous as he. He was riding a large-boned, fast-trotting bay horse, that pressed on as eagerly as his rider. As he hurried forward all made way for him, till he was close to the shrubs in the front of the house.

‘Bless my soul, gentlemen,’ he said, in an angry voice, ‘how, in the name of all that’s good, are hounds to hunt if you press them down the road in that way? By heaven’s, Barry, you are enough to drive a man wild. Yoicks, Merrylass! there it is, Pat;’—Pat was the huntsman—‘outside the low wall there, down towards the river.’ This was Sam O’Grady, the master of the Duhallow hounds, the god of Owen’s idolatry. No better fellow ever lived, and no master of hounds, so good; such at least was the opinion common among Duhallow sportsmen.

‘Yes, yer honer,—he did skirt round there, I knows that; but he’s been among them laurels at the bottom, and he’ll be about the place and out-houses somewhere. There’s a drain here that I knows on, and he knows on. But Mr. Owen, he knows on it too; and there aint a chance for him.’ So argued Pat, the Duhallow huntsman, the experienced craft of whose aged mind enabled him

to run counter to the cutest dodges of the cutest fox in that and any of the three neighbouring baronies.

And now the sweep before the door was crowded with red coats ; and Owen, looking from his dining-room window, felt that he must take some step. As an ordinary rule, had the hunt thus drifted near his homestead, he would have been off his horse and down among his bottles, sending up sherry and cherry-brandy ; and there would have been comfortable drink in plenty, and cold meat, perhaps, not in plenty ; and every one would have been welcome in and out of the house. But now there was that at his heart which forbade him to mix with the men who knew him so well, and among whom he was customarily so loudly joyous. Dressed as he was, he could not go among them without explaining why he had remained at home ; and as to that, he felt that he was not able to give any explanation at the present moment.

‘What’s the matter with Owen?’ said one fellow to Captain Donnellan.

‘Upon my word I hardly know. Two chaps came to him this morning, before he was up ; about business, they said. He nearly murdered one of them out of hand ; and I believe that he’s locked up somewhere with the other this minute.’

But in the meantime a servant came up to Mr.

O'Grady, and, touching his hat, asked the master of the hunt to go into the house for a moment; and then Mr. O'Grady, dismounting, entered in through the front door. He was only there two minutes, for his mind was still outside, among the laurels, with the fox; but as he put his foot again into the stirrup, he said to those around him that they must hurry away, and not disturb Owen Fitzgerald that day. It may, therefore, easily be imagined that the mystery would spread quickly through that portion of the county of Cork.

They must hurry away;—but not before they could give an account of their fox. Neither for gods nor men must he be left, as long as his skin was whole above ground. There is an importance attaching to the pursuit of a fox, which gives it a character quite distinct from that of any other amusement which men follow in these realms. It justifies almost anything that men can do, and that at any place and in any season. There is about it a sanctity which forbids interruption, and makes its votaries safe under any circumstances of trespass or intrusion. A man in a hunting county who opposes the county hunt must be a misanthrope, willing to live in seclusion, fond of being in Coventry, and in love with the enmity of his fellow-creatures. There are such men, but

they are regarded as lepers by those around them. All this adds to the nobleness of the noble sport, and makes it worthy of a man's energies.

And then the crowd of huntsmen hurried round from the front of the house to a paddock at the back, and then again through the stable yard to the front. The hounds were about—here, there, and everywhere, as any one ignorant of the craft would have said, but still always on the scent of that doomed beast. From one thicket to another he tried to hide himself, but the moist leaves of the underwood told quickly of his whereabouts. He tried every hole and cranny about the house, but every hole and corner had been stopped by Owen's jealous care. He would have lived disgraced for ever in his own estimation, had a fox gone to ground anywhere about his domicile. At last a loud whoop was heard just in front of the hall door. The poor fox, with his last gasp of strength, had betaken himself to the thicket before the door, and there the dogs had killed him, at the very spot on which Aby Mollett had fallen.

Standing well back from the window, still thinking of Clara Desmond, Owen Fitzgerald saw the fate of the hunted animal; he saw the head and tail severed from the carcase by old Pat, and the body thrown to the hounds,—a ceremony over

which he had presided so many scores of times; and then, when the dogs had ceased to growl over the bloody fragments, he saw the hunt move away, back along the avenue to the high road. All this he saw, but still he was thinking of Clara Desmond.

CHAPTER XI.

A MUDDY WALK ON A WET MORNING.

ALL that day of the hunt was passed very quietly at Castle Richmond. Herbert did not once leave the house, having begged Mr. Somers to make his excuse at a Relief Committee which it would have been his business to attend. A great portion of the day he spent with his father, who lay all but motionless, in a state that was apparently half comatose. During all those long hours very little was said between them about this tragedy of their family. Why should more be said now; now that the worst had befallen them—all that worst, to hide which Sir Thomas had endured such superhuman agony? And then four or five times during the day he went to his mother, but with her he did not stay long. To her he could hardly speak upon any subject, for to her as yet the story had not been told.

And she, when he thus came to her from time to time, with a soft word or two, or a softer kiss,

would ask him no question. She knew that he had learned the whole, and knew also from the solemn cloud on his brow that that whole must be very dreadful. Indeed we may surmise that her woman's heart had by this time guessed somewhat of the truth. But she would inquire of no one. Jones, she was sure, knew it all; but she did not ask a single question of her servant. It would be told to her when it was fitting. Why should she move in the matter?

Whenever Herbert entered her room she tried to receive him with something of a smile. It was clear enough that she was always glad of his coming, and that she made some little show of welcoming him. A book was always put away, very softly and by the slightest motion; but Herbert well knew what that book was, and whence his mother sought that strength which enabled her to live through such an ordeal as this.

And his sisters were to be seen, moving slowly about the house like the very ghosts of their former selves. Their voices were hardly heard; no ring of customary laughter ever came from the room in which they sat; when they passed their brother in the house they hardly dared to whisper to him. As to sitting down at table now with Mr. Prendergast, that effort was wholly abandoned; they kept themselves even from the sound of his footsteps.

Aunt Letty perhaps spoke more than the others, but what could she speak to the purpose? 'Herbert,' she once said, as she caught him close by the door of the library and almost pulled him into the room—'Herbert, I charge you to tell me what all this is!'

'I can tell you nothing, dear aunt, nothing;—nothing as yet.'

'But, Herbert, tell me this; is it about my sister?' For very many years past Aunt Letty had always called Lady Fitzgerald her sister.

'I can tell you nothing;—nothing to-day.'

'Then, to-morrow.'

'I do not know—we must let Mr. Prendergast manage this matter as he will. I have taken nothing on myself, Aunt Letty—nothing.'

'Then I tell you what, Herbert; it will kill me. It will kill us all, as it is killing your father and your darling mother. I tell you that it is killing her fast. Human nature cannot bear it. For myself I could endure anything if I were trusted.' And sitting down in one of the high-backed library chairs she burst into a flood of tears; a sight which, as regarded Aunt Letty, Herbert had never seen before.

What if they all died? thought Herbert to himself in the bitterness of the moment. There was that in store for some of them which was worse than death. What business had Aunt Letty to

talk of her misery? Of course she was wretched, as they all were; but how could she appreciate the burden that was on his back? What was Clara Desmond to her?

Shortly after noon Mr. Prendergast was back at the house; but he slunk up to his room, and no one saw anything of him. At half-past six he came down, and Herbert constrained himself to sit at the table while dinner was served; and so the day passed away. One more day only Mr. Prendergast was to stay at Castle Richmond; and then, if, as he expected, certain letters should reach him on that morning, he was to start for London late on the following day. It may well be imagined that he was not desirous of prolonging his visit.

Early on the following morning Herbert started for a long solitary walk. On that day Mr. Prendergast was to tell everything to his mother, and it was determined between them that her son should not be in the house during the telling. In the evening, when he came home, he was to see her. So he started on his walk, resolving some other things also in his mind before he went. He would reach Desmond Court before he returned home that day, and let the two ladies there know the fate that was before them. Then, after that, they might let him know what was to be his fate;—but on this head he would not hurry them.

So he started on his walk, resolving to go round by Gortnaclough on his way to Desmond Court, and then to return home from that place. The road would be more than twenty long Irish miles; but he felt that the hard work would be of service. It was instinct rather than thought which taught him that it would be good for him to put some strain on the muscles of his body, and thus relieve the muscles of his mind. If his limbs could become thoroughly tired,—thoroughly tired so that he might wish to rest—then he might hope that for a moment he might cease to think of all this sorrow which encompassed him.

So he started on his walk, taking with him a thick cudgel and his own thoughts. He went away across the demesne and down into the road that led away by Gortnaclough and Boherbue towards Castleisland and the wilds of county Kerry. As he went, the men about the place refrained from speaking to him, for they all knew that bad news had come to the big house. They looked at him with lowered eyes and with tenderness in their hearts, for they loved the very name of Fitzgerald. The love which a poor Irishman feels for the gentleman whom he regards as his master—‘his masther,’ though he has probably never received from him, in money, wages for a day’s work, and in all his intercourse has been the man who has paid money and not the

man who received it—the love which he nevertheless feels, if he has been occasionally looked on with a smiling face and accosted with a kindly word, is astonishing to an Englishman. I will not say that the feeling is altogether good. Love should come of love. Where personal love exists on one side, and not even personal regard on the other, there must be some mixture of servility. That unbounded respect for human grandeur cannot be altogether good; for human greatness, if the greatness be properly sifted, it may be so.

He got down into the road, and went forth upon his journey at a rapid pace. The mud was deep upon the way, but he went through the thickest without a thought of it. He had not been out long before there came on a cold, light, drizzling rain, such a rain as gradually but surely makes its way into the innermost rag of a man's clothing, running up the inside of his waterproof coat, and penetrating by its perseverance the very folds of his necktie. Such cold, drizzling rain is the commonest phase of hard weather during Irish winters, and those who are out and about get used to it and treat it tenderly. They are euphemistical as to the weather, calling it hazy and soft, and never allowing themselves to carry bad language on such a subject beyond the word dull. And yet at such a time one breathes the rain and again exhales it, and become, as it were

oneself a water spirit, assuming an aqueous fishlike nature into one's inner fibres. It must be acknowledged that a man does sometimes get wet in Ireland; but then a wetting there brings no cold in the head, no husky voice, no need for multitudinous pocket-handkerchiefs, as it does here in this land of catarrhs. It is the east wind and not the rain that kills; and of east wind in the south of Ireland they know nothing.

But Herbert walked on quite unmindful of the mist, swinging his thick stick in his hand, and ever increasing his pace as he went. He was usually a man careful of such things, but it was nothing to him now whether he were wet or dry. His mind was so full of the immediate circumstances of his destiny that he could not think of small external accidents. What was to be his future life in this world, and how was he to fight the battle that was now before him? That was the question which he continually asked himself, and yet never succeeded in answering. How was he to come down from the throne on which early circumstances had placed him, and hustle and struggle among the crowd for such approach to other thrones as his sinews and shoulders might procure for him? If he had been only born to the struggle, he said to himself, how easy and pleasant it would have been to him! But to find himself thus cast out from his place

by an accident—cast out with the eyes of all the world upon him; to be talked of, and pointed at, and pitied; to have little aids offered him by men whom he regarded as beneath him—all this was terribly sore, and the burden was almost too much for his strength. ‘I do not care for the money,’ he said to himself a dozen times; and in saying so he spoke in one sense truly. But he did care for things which money buys; for outward respect, permission to speak with authority among his fellow-men, for power and place, and the feeling that he was prominent in his walk of life. To be in advance of other men, that is the desire which is strongest in the hearts of all strong men; and in that desire how terrible a fall had he not received from this catastrophe!

And what were they all to do, he and his mother and his sisters? How were they to act—now, at once? In what way were they to carry themselves when this man of law and judgment should have gone from them? For himself, his course of action must depend much upon the word which might be spoken to him to-day at Desmond Court. There would still be a drop of comfort left at the bottom of his cup if he might be allowed to hope there. But in truth he feared greatly. What the countess would say to him he thought he could foretell; what it would behove him to say himself—in matter, though not

in words—that he knew well. Would not the two sayings tally well together? and could it be right for him even to hope that the love of a girl of seventeen should stand firm against her mother's will, when her lover himself could not dare to press his suit? And then another reflection pressed on his mind sorely. Clara had already given up one poor lover at her mother's instance; might she not resume that lover, also at her mother's instance, now that he was no longer poor? What if Owen Fitzgerald should take from him everything!

And so he walked on through the mud and rain, always swinging his big stick. Perhaps after all, the worst of it was over with him, when he could argue with himself in this way. It is the first plunge into the cold water that gives the shock. We may almost say that every human misery will cease to be miserable if it be duly faced; and something is done towards conquering our miseries, when we face them in any degree, even if not with due courage. Herbert had taken his plunge into the deep, dark, comfortless pool of misfortune; and he felt that the waters around him were very cold. But the plunge had been taken, and the worst, perhaps, was gone by.

As he approached near to Gortnaclough, he came upon one of those gangs of road-destroyers

who were now at work everywhere, earning their pittance of 'yellow meal' with a pickaxe and a wheelbarrow. In some sort or other the labourers had been got to their work. Gangsmen there were with lists, who did see, more or less accurately, that the men, before they received their sixpence or eightpence for their day's work, did at any rate pass their day with some sort of tool in their hands. And consequently the surface of the hill began to disappear, and there were chasms in the road, which caused those who travelled on wheels to sit still, staring across with angry eyes, and sometimes to apostrophize the doer of these deeds with very naughty words. The doer was the Board of Works, or the 'Board' as it was familiarly termed; and were it not that those ill words must have returned to the bosoms which vented them, and have flown no further, no Board could ever have been so terribly curse-laden. To find oneself at last utterly stopped, after proceeding with great strain to one's horse for half a mile through an artificial quagmire of slush up to the wheelbox, is harassing to the customary traveller; and men at that crisis did not bethink themselves quite so frequently as they should have done, that a people perishing from famine is more harassing.

But Herbert was not on wheels, and was proceeding through the slush and across the chasm,

regardless of it all, when he was stopped by some of the men. All the land thereabouts was Castle Richmond property; and it was not probable that the young master of it all would be allowed to pass through some two score of his own tenantry without greetings, and petitions, and blessings, and complaints.

‘Faix, yer honer, thin, Mr. Herbert,’ said one man, standing at the bottom of the hill, with the half-filled wheelbarrow still hanging in his hands—an Englishman would have put down the barrow while he was speaking, making some inner calculation about the waste of his muscles; but an Irishman would despise himself for such low economy—‘Faix, thin, yer honer, Mr. Herbert; an’ it’s yourself is a sight good for sore eyes. May the heavens be your bed, for it’s you is the frind to a poor man.’

‘How are you, Pat?’ said Herbert, without intending to stop. ‘How are you, Mooney? I hope the work suits you all.’ And then he would at once have passed on, with his hat pressed down low over his brow.

But this could be by no means allowed. In the first place, the excitement arising from the young master’s presence was too valuable to be lost so suddenly; and then, when might again occur so excellent a time for some mention of their heavy grievances? Men whose whole amount of worldly

good consists in a bare allowance of nauseous food, just sufficient to keep body and soul together, must be excused if they wish to utter their complaints to ears that can hear them.

‘Arrah, yer honer, thin, we’re none on us very well; and how could we, with the male at a penny a pound?’ said Pat.

‘Sorrow to it for male,’ said Mooney. ‘It’s the worst vittles iver a man tooked into the inside of him. Saving yer honer’s presence it’s as much as I can do to raise the bare arm of me since the day I first began with the yally male.’

‘It’s as wake as cats we all is,’ said another, who from the weary way in which he dragged his limbs about certainly did not himself seem to be gifted with much animal strength.

‘And the childer is worse, yer honer,’ said a fourth. ‘The male is bad for them intirely. Saving yer honer’s presence, their bellies is gone away most to nothing.’

‘And there’s six of us in family, yer honer,’ said Pat. ‘Six mouths to feed; and what’s eight pennorth of yally male among such a lot as that; let alone the Sundays, when there’s nothing?’

‘An’ shure, Mr. Herbert,’ said another, a small man with a squeaking voice, whose rags of clothes hardly hung on to his body, ‘warn’t I here with the other boys the last Friday as iver was? Ax Pat Condon else, yer honer; and yet when they

comed to give out the wages, they scorned me of ——.’ And so on. There were as many complaints to be made as there were men, if only he could bring himself to listen to them.

On ordinary occasions Herbert would listen to them, and answer them, and give them, at any rate, the satisfaction which they derived from discoursing with him, if he could give them no other satisfaction. But now, on this day, with his own burden so heavy at his heart, he could not even do this. He could not think of their sorrows; his own sorrow seemed to him to be so much the heavier. So he passed on, running the gauntlet through them as best he might, and shaking them off from him, as they attempted to cling round his steps. Nothing is so powerful in making a man selfish as misfortune.

And then he went on to Gortnaclough. He had not chosen his walk to this place with any fixed object, except this perhaps, that it enabled him to return home round by Desmond Court. It was one of the places at which a Relief Committee sat every fortnight, and there was a soup-kitchen here, which, however, had not been so successful as the one at Berryhill; and it was the place of residence selected by Father Barney’s coadjutor. But in spite of all this, when Herbert found himself in the wretched, dirty, straggling, damp street of the village, he did not

know what to do or where to betake himself. That every eye in Gortnaclough would be upon him was a matter of course. He could hardly turn round on his heel and retrace his steps through the village, as he would have to do in going to Desmond Court, without showing some pretext for his coming there; so he walked into the little shop which was attached to the soup-kitchen, and there he found the Rev. Mr. Columb Creagh, giving his orders to the little girl behind the counter.

Herbert Fitzgerald was customarily very civil to the Roman Catholic priests around him,—some-what more so, indeed, than seemed good to those very excellent ladies, Mrs. Townsend and Aunt Letty; but it always went against the grain with him to be civil to the Rev. Columb Creagh; and on this special day it would have gone against the grain with him to be civil to anybody. But the coadjutor knew his character, and was delighted to have an opportunity of talking to him, when he could do so without being snubbed either by Mr. Somers, the chairman, or by his own parish priest. Mr. Creagh had rejoiced much at the idea of forming one at the same council board with county magistrates and Protestant parsons; but the fruition of his promised delights had never quite reached his lips. He had been like Sancho Panza in his government;

he had sat down to the grand table day after day, but had never yet been allowed to enjoy the rich dish of his own oratory. Whenever he had proposed to help himself, Mr. Somers or Father Barney had stopped his mouth. Now probably he might be able to say a word or two; and though the glory would not be equal to that of making a speech at the Committee, still it would be something to be seen talking on equal terms, and on affairs of state, to the young heir of Castle Richmond.

‘Mr. Fitzgerald! well, I declare! And how are you, sir?’ And he took off his hat and bowed, and got hold of Herbert’s hand, shaking it ruthlessly; and altogether he made him very disagreeable.

Herbert, though his mind was not really intent on the subject, asked some question of the girl as to the amount of meal that had been sold, and desired to see the little passbook that they kept at the shop.

‘We are doing pretty well, Mr. Fitzgerald,’ said the coadjutor; ‘pretty well. I always keep my eye on, for fear things should go wrong, you know.’

‘I don’t think they’ll do that,’ said Herbert.

‘No; I hope not. But it’s always good to be on the safe side, you know. And to tell you the truth, I don’t think we’re altogether on the right

tack about them shops. It's very hard on a poor woman—'

Now the fact was, though the Relief Committee at Gortnaclough was attended by magistrates, priests, and parsons, the shop there was Herbert Fitzgerald's own affair. It had been stocked with his or his father's money; the flour was sold without profit at his risk, and the rent of the house and wages of the woman who kept it came out of his own pocket-money. Under these circumstances he did not see cause why Mr. Creagh should interfere, and at the present moment was not well inclined to put up with such interference.

'We do the best we can, Mr. Creagh,' said he, interrupting the priest. 'And no good will be done at such a time as this by unnecessary difficulties.'

'No, no, certainly not. But still I do think—' And Mr. Creagh was girding up his loins for eloquence, when he was again interrupted.

'I am rather in a hurry to-day,' said Herbert, 'and therefore, if you please, we won't make any change now. Never mind the book to-day, Sally. Good day, Mr. Creagh.' And so saying, he left the shop and walked rapidly back out of the village.

The poor coadjutor was left alone at the shop-door, anathematizing in his heart the pride of all

Protestants. He had been told that this Mr. Fitzgerald was different from others, that he was a man fond of priests and addicted to the 'ould religion;' and so hearing, he had resolved to make the most of such an excellent disposition. But he was forced to confess to himself that they were all alike. Mr. Somers could not have been more imperious, nor Mr. Townsend more insolent.

And then, through the still drizzling rain, Herbert walked on to Desmond Court. By the time that he reached the desolate-looking lodge at the demesne gate, he was nearly wet through, and was besmeared with mud up to his knees. But he had thought nothing of this as he walked along. His mind had been intent on the scene that was before him. In what words was he to break the news to Clara Desmond and her mother? and with what words would they receive the tidings? The former question he had by no means answered to his own satisfaction, when, all muddy and wet, he passed up to the house through that desolate gate.

'Is Lady Desmond at home?' he asked of the butler. 'Her ladyship is at home,' said the gray-haired old man, with his blindest smile, 'and so is Lady Clara.' He had already learned to look on the heir of Castle Richmond as the coming saviour of the impoverished Desmond family.

CHAPTER XII.

COMFORTLESS.

‘BUT, Mr. Herbert, yer honor, you’re wet through and through—surely,’ said the butler, as soon as Fitzgerald was well inside the hall. Herbert muttered something about his being only damp, and that it did not signify. But it did signify, —very much,—in the butler’s estimation. Whose being wet through could signify more; for was not Mr. Herbert to be a baronet, and to have the spending of twelve thousand a year; and would he not be the future husband of Lady Clara? not signify indeed!

‘An’ shure, Mr. Herbert, you haven’t walked to Desmond Court this blessed morning. Tare an’ ages! Well; there’s no knowing what you young gentlemen won’t do. But I’ll see and get a pair of trousers of my Lord’s ready for you in two minutes. Faix, and he’s nearly as big as yourself, now Mr. Herbert.’

But Herbert would hardly speak to him, and gave no assent whatever as to his proposition for

borrowing the Earl's clothes. 'I'll go in as I am,' said he. And the old man looking into his face saw that there was something wrong. 'Shure an' he ain't going to sthrike off now,' said this Irish Caleb Balderstone to himself. He also as well as some others about Desmond Court had feared greatly that Lady Clara would throw herself away upon a poor lover.

It was now past noon, and Fitzgerald pressed forward into the room in which Lady Clara usually sat. It was the same in which she had received Owen's visit, and here of a morning she was usually to be found alone; but on this occasion when he opened the door he found that her mother was with her. Since the day on which Clara had disposed of herself so excellently, the mother had spent more of her time with her daughter. Looking at Clara now through Herbert Fitzgerald's eyes, the Countess had begun to confess to herself that her child did possess beauty and charm.

She got up to greet her future son-in-law with a sweet smile and that charming quiet welcome with which a woman so well knows how to make her house pleasant to a man that is welcome to it. And Clara, not rising, but turning her head round and looking at him, greeted him also. He came forward and took both their hands, and it was not till he had held Clara's for half a minute in his own that they both saw that he was more

than ordinarily serious. 'I hope Sir Thomas is not worse,' said Lady Desmond, with that voice of feigned interest which is so common. After all, if anything should happen to the poor old weak gentleman, might it not be as well?

'My father has not been very well these last two days,' he said.

'I am so sorry,' said Clara. 'And your mother, Herbert?'

'But Herbert, how wet you are. You must have walked,' said the Countess.

Herbert, in a few dull words said that he had walked. He had thought that the walk would be good for him, and he had not expected that it would be so wet. And then Lady Desmond, looking carefully into his face, saw that in truth he was very serious;—so much so that she knew that he had come there on account of his seriousness. But still his sorrow did not in any degree go to her heart. He was grieving doubtless for his father,—or his mother. The house at Castle Richmond was probably sad, because sickness and fear of death were there;—nay perhaps death itself now hanging over some loved head. But what was this to her? She had had her own sorrows;—enough of them perhaps to account for her being selfish. So with a solemn face, but with nothing amiss about her heart, she again asked for tidings from Castle Richmond.

‘Do tell us,’ said Clara, getting up. ‘I am afraid Sir Thomas is very ill.’ The old baronet had been kind to her, and she did regard him. To her it was a sorrow to think that there should be any sorrow at Castle Richmond.

‘Yes; he is ill,’ said Herbert. ‘We have had a gentleman from London with us for the last few days—a friend of my father’s. His name is Mr. Prendergast.’

‘Is he a doctor?’ asked the Countess.

‘No, not a doctor,’ said Herbert. ‘He is a lawyer.’

It was very hard for him to begin his story; and perhaps the more so in that he was wet through and covered with mud. He now felt cold and clammy, and began to have an idea that he should not be seated there in that room in such a guise. Clara, too, had instinctively learned from his face, and tone, and general bearing that something truly was the matter. At other times when he had been there, since that day on which he had been accepted, he had been completely master of himself. Perhaps it had almost been deemed a fault in him that he had had none of the timidity or hesitation of a lover. He had seemed to feel, no doubt, that he, with his fortune and position at his back, need feel no scruple in accepting as his own the fair hand for which he had asked. But now—nothing could be

more different from this than his manner was now.

Lady Desmond was now surprised, though probably not as yet frightened. Why should a lawyer have come from London to visit Sir Thomas at a period of such illness? and why should Herbert have walked over to Desmond Court to tell them of this illness? There must be something in this lawyer's coming which was intended to bear in some way on her daughter's marriage. 'But, Herbert,' she said, 'you are quite wet. Will you not put on some of Patrick's things?'

'No, thank you,' said he; 'I shall not stay long. I shall soon have said what I have got to say.'

'But do, Herbert,' said Clara. 'I cannot bear to see you so uncomfortable. And then you will not be in such a hurry to go back.'

'Ill as my father is,' said he, 'I cannot stay long; but I have thought it my duty to come over and tell you—tell you what has happened at Castle Richmond.'

And now the countess was frightened. There was that in Herbert's tone of voice and the form of his countenance which was enough to frighten any woman. What had happened at Castle Richmond? what could have happened there to make necessary the presence of a lawyer, and at the same time thus to sadden her future son-in-

law? And Clara also was frightened, though she knew not why. His manner was so different from that which was usual; he was so cold, and serious, and awe-struck, that she could not but be unhappy.

‘And what is it?’ said the Countess.

Herbert then sat for a few minutes silent, thinking how best he should tell them his story. He had been all the morning resolving to tell it, but he had in nowise as yet fixed upon any method. It was all so terribly tragic, so frightful in the extent of its reality, that he hardly knew how it would be possible for him to get through his task.

‘I hope that no misfortune has come upon any of the family,’ said Lady Desmond, now beginning to think that there might be misfortunes which would affect her own daughter more nearly than the illness either of the baronet or of his wife.

‘Oh, I hope not!’ said Clara, getting up and clasping her hands. ‘What is it, Herbert? why don’t you speak?’ And coming round to him, she took hold of his arm.

‘Dearest Clara,’ he said, looking at her with more tenderness than had ever been usual with him, ‘I think that you had better leave us. I could tell it better to your mother alone.’

‘Do, Clara, love. Go, dearest, and we will call you by-and-by.’

Clara moved away very slowly towards the door, and then she turned round. 'If it is any thing that makes you unhappy, Herbert,' she said, 'I must know it before you leave me.'

'Yes, yes; either I or your mother—. You shall be told, certainly.'

'Yes, yes, you shall be told,' said the countess. 'And now go, my darling.' Thus dismissed, Clara did go, and betook herself to her own chamber. Had Owen had sorrows to tell her, he would have told them to herself; of that she was quite sure. 'And now, Herbert, for heaven's sake what is it?' said the countess, pale with terror. She was fully certain now that something was to be spoken which would be calculated to interfere with her daughter's prospects.

We all know the story which Herbert had to tell, and we need not therefore again be present at the telling of it. Sitting there, wet through, in Lady Desmond's drawing-room, he did contrive to utter it all—the whole of it from the beginning to the end, making it clearly to be understood that he was no longer Fitzgerald of Castle Richmond, but a nameless, penniless outcast, without the hope of portion or position, doomed from henceforth to earn his bread in the sweat of his brow—if only he could be fortunate enough to find the means of earning it.

Nor did Lady Desmond once interrupt him in

his story. She sat perfectly still, listening to him almost with unmoved face. She was too wise to let him know what the instant working of her mind might be before she had made her own fixed resolve; and she had conceived the truth much before he had completed the telling of it. We generally use three times the number of words which are necessary for the purpose which we have in hand; but had he used six times the number, she would not have interrupted him. It was good in him to give her this time to determine in what tone and with what words she would speak, when speaking on her part should become absolutely necessary. 'And now,' he concluded by saying—and at this time he was standing up on the rug—'you know it all, Lady Desmond. It will perhaps be best that Clara should learn it from you.'

He had said not a word of giving up his pretensions to Lady Clara's hand; but then neither had he in any way hinted that the match should, in his opinion, be regarded as unbroken. He had not spoken of his sorrow at bringing down all this poverty on his wife; and surely he would have so spoken had he thought their engagement was still valid; but then he had not himself pointed out that the engagement must necessarily be broken, as, in Lady Desmond's opinion, he certainly should have done.

‘Yes,’ said she, in a cold, low, meaningless voice—in a voice that told nothing by its tones—‘Lady Clara had better hear it from me.’ But in the title which she gave her daughter, Herbert instantly read his doom. He, however, remained silent. It was for the countess now to speak.

‘But it is possible it may not be true,’ she said, speaking almost in a whisper, looking, not into his face, but by him, at the fire.

‘It is possible; but so barely possible, that I did not think it right to keep the matter from you any longer.’

‘It would have been very wrong—very wicked, I may say,’ said the countess.

‘It is only two days since I knew anything of it myself,’ said he, vindicating himself.

‘You were of course bound to let me know immediately,’ she said, harshly.

‘And I have let you know immediately, Lady Desmond.’ And then they were both again silent for a while.

‘And Mr. Prendergast thinks there is no doubt?’ she asked.

‘None,’ said Herbert, very decidedly.

‘And he has told your cousin Owen?’

‘He did so yesterday; and by this time my poor mother knows it also.’ And then there was another period of silence.

During the whole time Lady Desmond had uttered no one word of condolence—not a syllable of commiseration for all the sufferings that had come upon Herbert and his family; and he was beginning to hate her for her harshness. The tenor of her countenance had become hard; and she received all his words as a judge might have taken them, merely wanting evidence before he pronounced his verdict. The evidence she was beginning to think sufficient, and there could be no doubt as to her verdict. After what she had heard, a match between Herbert Fitzgerald and her daughter would be out of the question. ‘It is very dreadful,’ she said, thinking only of her own child, and absolutely shivering at the danger which had been incurred.

‘It is very dreadful,’ said Herbert, shivering also. It was almost incredible to him that his great sorrow should be received in such a way by one who had professed to be so dear a friend to him.

‘And what do you propose to do, Mr. Fitzgerald?’ said the countess.

‘What do I propose?’ he said, repeating her words. ‘Hitherto I have had neither time nor heart to propose anything. Such a misfortune as that which I have told you does not break upon a man without disturbing for a while his power of resolving. I have thought so much of

my mother, and of Clara, since Mr. Prendergast told me all this, that—that—that—' And then a slight gurgling struggle fell upon his throat and hindered him from speaking. He did not quite sob out, and he determined that he would not do so. If she could be so harsh and strong, he would be harsh and strong also.

And again Lady Desmond sat silent, still thinking how she had better speak and act. After all she was not so cruel nor so bad as Herbert Fitzgerald thought her. What had the Fitzgeralds done for her that she should sorrow for their sorrows? She had lived there, in that old ugly barrack, long desolate, full of dreary wretchedness and poverty, and Lady Fitzgerald in her prosperity had never come to her to soften the hardness of her life. She had come over to Ireland a countess, and a countess she had been, proud enough at first in her little glory—too proud, no doubt; and proud enough afterwards in her loneliness and poverty; and there she had lived—alone. Whether the fault had been her own or no, she owed little to the kindness of any one; for no one had done aught to relieve her bitterness. And then her weak puny child had grown up in the same shade, and was now a lovely woman, gifted with high birth, and that special priceless beauty which high blood so often gives. There was a prize now

within the walls of that old barrack—something to be won—something for which a man would strive, and a mother smile that her son might win it. And now Lady Fitzgerald had come to her. She had never complained of this, she said to herself. The bargain between Clara Desmond and Herbert Fitzgerald had been good for both of them, and let it be made and settled as a bargain. Young Herbert Fitzgerald had money and position; her daughter had beauty and high blood. Let it be a bargain. But in all this there was nothing to make her love that rich prosperous family at Castle Richmond. There are those whose nature it is to love new-found friends at a few hours' warning, but the Countess of Desmond was not one of them. The bargain had been made, and her daughter would have been able to perform her part of it. She was still able to give that which she had stipulated to give. But Herbert Fitzgerald was now a bankrupt, and could give nothing! Would it not have been madness to suppose that the bargain should still hold good?

One person and one only had come to her at Desmond Court, whose coming had been a solace to her weariness. Of all those among whom she had lived in cold desolateness for so many years, one only had got near her heart. There had been but one Irish voice that she had cared to

hear; and the owner of that voice had loved her child instead of loving her.

And she had borne that wretchedness too, if not well, at least bravely. True she had separated that lover from her daughter; but the circumstances of both had made it right for her, as a mother, to do so. What mother, circumstanced as she had been, would have given her girl to Owen Fitzgerald? So she had banished from the house the only voice that sounded sweetly in her ears, and again she had been alone.

And then, perhaps, thoughts had come to her, when Herbert Fitzgerald was frequent about the place, a rich and thriving wooer, that Owen might come again to Desmond Court, when Clara had gone to Castle Richmond. Years were stealing over her. Ah, yes. She knew that full well. All her youth and the pride of her days she had given up for that countess-ship which she now wore so gloomily—given up for pieces of gold which had turned to stone and slate and dirt within her grasp. Years, alas, were fast stealing over her! But nevertheless she had something to give. Her woman's beauty was not all faded; and she had a heart which was as yet virgin—which had hitherto loved no other man. Might not that suffice to cover a few years, seeing that in return she wanted nothing but love? And so she had thought, lingering over her hopes, while Herbert was there at his wooing.

It may be imagined with what feelings at her heart she had seen and listened to the frantic attempt made by Owen to get back his childish love. But that too she had borne, bravely, if not well. It had not angered her that her child was loved by the only man she had ever loved herself. She had stroked her daughter's hair that day, and kissed her cheek, and bade her be happy with her better, richer lover. And had she not been right in this? Nor had she been angry even with Owen. She could forgive him all, because she loved him. But might there not even yet be a chance for her when Clara should in very truth have gone to Castle Richmond?

But now! How was she to think about all this now? And thinking of these things, how was it possible that she should have heart left to feel for the miseries of Lady Fitzgerald? With all her miseries would not Lady Fitzgerald still be more fortunate than she? Let come what might, Lady Fitzgerald had had a life of prosperity and love. No; she could not think of Lady Fitzgerald, nor of Herbert: she could only think of Owen Fitzgerald, of her daughter, and of herself.

He, Owen, was now the heir to Castle Richmond, and would, as far as she could learn, soon become the actual possessor. He, who had been cast forth from Desmond Court as too poor and

contemptible in the world's eye to be her daughter's suitor, would become the rich inheritor of all those broad acres, and that old coveted family honour. And this Owen still loved her daughter—loved her not as Herbert did, with a quiet, gentleman-like, every-day attachment, but with the old, true, passionate love of which she had read in books, and dreamed herself, before she had sold herself to be a countess. That Owen did so love her daughter, she was very sure. And then, as to her daughter; that she did not still love this new heir in her heart of hearts—of that the mother was by no means sure. That her child had chosen the better part in choosing money and a title, she had not doubted; and that having so chosen Clara would be happy,—of that also she did not doubt. Clara was young, she would say, and her heart in a few months would follow her hand.

But now! How was she to decide, sitting there with Herbert Fitzgerald before her, gloomy as death, cold, shivering, and muddy, telling of his own disasters with no more courage than a whipped dog? As she looked at him she declared to herself twenty times in half a second that he had not about him a tithe of the manhood of his cousin Owen. Women love a bold front, and a voice that will never own its master to have been beaten in the world's fight. Had

Owen came there with such a story, he would have claimed his right boldly to the lady's hand, in spite of all that the world had done to him.

‘Let her have him,’ said Lady Desmond to herself; and the struggle within her bosom was made and over. No wonder that Herbert, looking into her face for pity, should find that she was harsh and cruel. She had been sacrificing herself, and had completed the sacrifice. Owen Fitzgerald, the heir to Castle Richmond, Sir Owen as he would soon be, should have her daughter. They two, at any rate, should be happy. And she—she would live there at Desmond Court, lonely as she had ever lived. While all this was passing through her mind, she hardly thought of Herbert and his sorrows. That he must be given up and abandoned, and left to make what best fight he could by himself; as to that how was it possible that she as a mother should have any doubt?

And yet it was a pity—a thousand pities. Herbert Fitzgerald, with his domestic virtues, his industry and thorough respectability, would so exactly have suited Clara's taste and mode of life—had he only continued to be the heir of Castle Richmond. She and Owen would not enter upon the world together with nearly the same fair chance of happiness. Who could prophesy to what Owen might be led with his

passionate impulses, his strong will, his unbridled temper, and his love of pleasure? That he was noble-hearted, affectionate, brave, and tender in his inmost spirit, Lady Desmond was very sure; but were such the qualities which would make her daughter happy? When Clara should come to know her future lord as Clara's mother knew him, would Clara love him and worship him as her mother did? The mother believed that Clara had not in her bosom heart enough for such a love. But then, as I have said before, the mother did not know the daughter.

'You say that you will break all this to Clara,' said Herbert, having during this silence turned over some of his thoughts also in his mind. 'If so I may as well leave you now. You can imagine that I am anxious to get back to my mother.'

'Yes, it will be better that I should tell her. It is very sad, very sad, very sad indeed.'

'Yes; it is a hard load for a man to bear,' he answered, speaking very, very slowly. 'But for myself I think I can bear it, if—'

'If what?' asked the countess.

'If Clara can bear it.'

And now it was necessary that Lady Desmond should speak out. She did not mean to be unnecessarily harsh; but she did mean to be decided, and as she spoke her face became stern

and ill-favoured. 'That Clara will be terribly distressed,' she said, 'terribly, terribly distressed,' repeating her words with great emphasis; 'of that I am quite sure. She is very young, and will, I hope, in time get over it. And then too I think she is one whose feelings, young as she is, have never conquered her judgment. Therefore I do believe that, with God's mercy, she will be able to bear it. But, Mr. Fitzgerald—'

'Well?'

'Of course you feel with me—and I am sure that with your excellent judgment it is a thing of course—that everything must be over between you and Lady Clara.' And then she came to a full stop as though all had been said that could be considered necessary.

Herbert did not answer at once, but stood there shivering and shaking in his misery. He was all but overcome by the chill of his wet garments; and though he struggled to throw off the dead feeling of utter cold which struck him to the heart, he was quite unable to master it. He could hardly forgive himself that on such an occasion he should have been so conquered by his own outer feelings, but now he could not help himself. He was weak with hunger too—though he did not know it, for he had hardly eaten food that day, and was nearly exhausted with the unaccustomed amount of hard exercise which he

had taken. He was moreover thoroughly wet through, and heavy laden with the mud of the road. It was no wonder that Lady Desmond had said to herself that he looked like a whipped dog.

‘That must be as Lady Clara shall decide,’ he said at last, barely uttering the words through his chattering teeth.

‘It must be as I say,’ said the countess firmly; ‘whether by her decision or by yours—or if necessary by mine. But if your feelings are, as I take them to be, those of a man of honour, you will not leave it to me or to her. What! now that you have the world to struggle with, would you seek to drag her down into the struggle?’

‘Our union was to be for better or worse. I would have given her all the better, and—’

‘Yes; and had there been a union she would have bravely borne her part in sharing the worst. But who ought to be so thankful as you that this truth has broken upon you before you had clogged yourself with a wife of high birth but without fortune? Alone, a man educated as you are, with your talents, may face the world without fearing anything. But how could you make your way now if my daughter were your wife? When you think of it, Mr. Fitzgerald, you will cease to wish for it.’

‘Never; I have given my heart to your daughter, and I cannot take back the gift. She has accepted it, and she cannot return it.’

‘And what would you have her do?’ Lady Desmond asked, with anger and almost passion in her voice.

‘Wait—as I must wait,’ said Herbert. ‘That will be her duty, as I believe it will also be her wish.’

‘Yes, and wear out her young heart here in solitude for the next ten years, and then learn when her beauty and her youth are gone—. But no, Mr. Fitzgerald; I will not allow myself to contemplate such a prospect either for her or for you. Under the lamentable circumstances which you have now told me it is imperative that this match should be broken off. Ask your own mother and hear what she will say. And if you are a man you will not throw upon my poor child the hard task of declaring that it must be so. You, by your calamity, are unable to perform your contract with her; and it is for you to announce that that contract is therefore over.’

Herbert in his present state was unable to argue with Lady Desmond. He had in his brain, and mind, and heart, and soul—at least so he said to himself afterwards, having perhaps but a loose idea of the different functions of these four different properties—a thorough conviction that as

he and Clara had sworn to each other that for life they would live together and love each other, no misfortune to either of them could justify the other in breaking that oath ;—could even justify him in breaking it, though he was the one on whom misfortune had fallen. He, no doubt, had first loved Clara for her beauty ; but would he have ceased to love her, or have cast her from him, if, by God's will, her beauty had perished and gone from her ? Would he not have held her closer to his heart, and told her, with strong comforting vows, that his love had now gone deeper than that ; that they were already of the same bone, of the same flesh, of the same family and hearth-stone ? He knew himself in this, and knew that he would have been proud so to do, and so to feel,—that he would have cast from him with utter indignation any who would have counselled him to do or to feel differently. And why should Clara's heart be different from his ?

All this, I say, was his strong conviction. But, nevertheless, her heart might be different. She might look on that engagement of theirs with altogether other thoughts and other ideas ; and if so his voice should never reproach her ;—not his voice, however his heart might do so. Such might be the case with her, but he did not think it ; and therefore he would not pronounce that decision which Clara's mother expected from him

‘When you have told her of this, I suppose I may be allowed to see her,’ he said, avoiding the direct proposition which Lady Desmond had made to him.

‘Allowed to see her?’ said Lady Desmond, now also in her turn speaking very slowly. ‘I cannot answer that question as yet; not quite immediately, I should say. But if you will leave the matter in my hands, I will write to you, if not to-morrow, then the next day.’

‘I would sooner that she should write.’

‘I cannot promise that—I do not know how far her good sense and strength may support her under this affliction. That she will suffer terribly, on your account as well as on her own, you may be quite sure.’ And then, again, there was a pause of some moments.

‘I at any rate shall write to her,’ he then said, ‘and shall tell her that I expect her to see me. Her will in this matter shall be my will. If she thinks that her misery will be greater in being engaged to a poor man, than,—than in relinquishing her love, she shall hear no word from me to overpersuade her. But, Lady Desmond, I will say nothing that shall authorize her to think that she is given up by me, till I have in some way learned from herself, what her own feelings are. And now I will say good-bye to you.’

‘Good-bye,’ said the countess, thinking that

it might be as well that the interview should be ended. 'But, Mr. Fitzgerald, you are very wet ; and I fear that you are very cold. You had better take something before you go.' Countess as she was she had no carriage in which she could send him home ; no horse even on which he could ride. 'Nothing, thank you, Lady Desmond,' he said ; and so, without offering her the courtesy of his hand he walked out of the room.

He was very angry with her, as he tried to make the blood run quicker in his veins by hurrying down the avenue into the road at his quickest pace. So angry with her, that for a while, in his indignation, he almost forgot his father and his mother and his own family tragedy. That she should have wished to save her daughter from such a marriage might have been natural ; but that she should have treated him so coldly, so harshly—without one spark of love or pity,—him, who to her had been so loyal during his courtship of her daughter ! It was almost incredible to him. Was not his story one that would have melted the heart of a stranger—at which men would weep ? He himself had seen tears in the eyes of that dry time-worn world-used London lawyer, as the full depth of the calamity had forced itself upon his heart. Yes, Mr. Prendergast had not been able to repress his tears when he told the tale ; but Lady Desmond

had shed no tears when the tale had been told to her. No soft woman's message had been sent to the afflicted mother on whom it had pleased God to allow so heavy a hand to fall. No word of tenderness had been uttered for the sinking father. There had been no feeling for the household which was to have been so nearly linked with her own. No. Looking round with greedy eyes for wealth for her daughter, Lady Desmond had found a match that suited her. Now that match no longer suited her greed, and she could throw from her without a struggle to her feelings the suitor that was now poor, and the family of the suitor that was now neither grand nor powerful.

And then too he felt angry with Clara, though he knew that as yet, at any rate, he had no cause. In spite of what he had said and felt, he would imagine to himself that she also would be cold and untrue. 'Let her go,' he said to himself. 'Love is worth nothing—nothing if it does not believe itself to be of more worth than everything beside. If she does not love me now in my misery—if she would not choose me now for her husband—her love has never been worthy the name. Love that has no faith in itself, that does not value itself above all worldly things, is nothing. If it be not so with her, let her go back to him.'

It may easily be understood who was the him.

And then Herbert walked on so rapidly that at length his strength almost failed him, and in his exhaustion he had more than once to lean against a gate on the road-side. With difficulty at last he got home, and dragged himself up the long avenue to the front door. Even yet he was not warm through to his heart, and he felt as he entered the house that he was quite unfitted for the work which he might yet have to do before he could go to his bed.

CHAPTER XIII..

COMFORTED.

WHEN Herbert Fitzgerald got back to Castle Richmond it was nearly dark. He opened the hall door without ringing the bell, and walking at once into the dining-room, threw himself into a large leathern chair which always stood near the fire-place. There was a bright fire burning on the hearth, and he drew himself close to it, putting his wet feet up on to the fender, thinking that he would at any rate warm himself before he went in among any of the family. The room, with its deep red curtains and ruby-embossed paper, was almost dark, and he knew that he might remain there unseen and unnoticed for the next half hour. If he could only get a glass of wine! He tried the cellaret, which was as often open as locked, but now unfortunately it was closed. In such a case it was impossible to say whether the butler had the key or Aunt Letty; so he sat himself down without that luxury.

By this time, as he well knew, all would have been told to his mother, and his first duty would be to go to her—to go to her and comfort her, if comfort might be possible, by telling her that he could bear it all ; that as far as he was concerned title and wealth and a proud name were as nothing to him in comparison with his mother's love. In whatever guise he may have appeared before Lady Desmond, he would not go to his mother with a fainting heart. She should not hear his teeth chatter, nor see his limbs shake. So he sat himself down there that he might become warm, and in five minutes he was fast asleep.

How long he slept he did not know ; not very long, probably ; but when he awoke it was quite dark. He gazed at the fire for a moment, bethought himself of where he was and why, shook himself to get rid of his slumber, and then roused himself in his chair. As he did so a soft sweet voice close to his shoulder spoke to him. 'Herbert,' it said, 'are you awake?' And he found that his mother, seated by his side on a low stool, had been watching him in his sleep.'

'Mother!' he exclaimed.

'Herbert, my child, my son!' And the mother and son were fast locked in each other's arms.

He had sat down there thinking how he would go to his mother and offer her solace in her sorrow ; how he would bid her be of good cheer,

and encourage her to bear the world as the world had now fallen to her lot. He had pictured to himself that he would find her sinking in despair, and had promised himself that with his vows, his kisses, and his prayers, he would bring her back to her self-confidence, and induce her to acknowledge that God's mercy was yet good to her. But now, on awakening, he discovered that she had been tending him in his misery, and watching him while he slept, that she might comfort him with her caresses the moment that he awoke to the remembrance of his misfortunes.

‘Herbert, Herbert, my son, my son!’ she said again, as she pressed him close in her arms.

‘Mother, has he told you?’

Yes, she had learned it all; but hardly more than she had known before; or, at any rate, not more than she had expected. As she now told him, for many days past she had felt that this trouble which had fallen upon his father must have come from the circumstances of their marriage. And she would have spoken out, she said, when the idea became clear to her, had she not then been told that Mr. Prendergast had been invited to come thither from London. Then she knew that she had better remain silent, at any rate till his visit had been made.

And Herbert again sat in the chair, and his mother crouched, or almost kneeled, on the

cushion at his knee. 'Dearest, dearest, dearest mother,' he said, as he supported her head against his shoulder, 'we must love each other now more than ever we have loved.'

'And you forgive us, Herbert, for all that we have done to you?'

'Mother, if you speak in that way to me you will kill me. My darling, darling mother!'

There was but little more said between them upon the matter—but little more, at least, in words; but there was an infinity of caresses, and deep—deep assurances of undying love and confidence. And then she asked him about his bride, and he told her where he had been, and what had happened. 'You must not claim her, Herbert,' she said to him. 'God is good, and will teach you to bear even that also.'

'Must I not?' he asked, with a sadly plaintive voice.

'No, my child. You invited her to share your prosperity, and would it be just—'

'But, mother, if she wills it?'

'It is for you to give her back her troth, then leave it to time and her own heart.'

'But if she love me, mother, she will not take back her troth. Would I take back hers because she was in sorrow?'

'Men and women, Herbert, are different. The oak cares not whether the creeper which hangs to

it be weak or strong. If it be weak the oak can give it strength. But the staff which has to support the creeper must needs have strength of its own.'

He made no further answer to her, but understood that he must do as she bade him. He understood, now also, without many arguments within himself, that he had no right to expect from Clara Desmond that adherence to him and his misfortunes which he would have owed to her had she been unfortunate. He understood this now; but still he hoped. 'Two hearts that have once become as one cannot be separated,' he said to himself that night, as he resolved that it was his duty to write to her, unconditionally returning to her her pledges.

'But, Herbert, what a state you are in!' said Lady Fitzgerald, as the flame of the coal glimmering out, threw a faint light upon his clothes.

'Yes, mother; I have been walking.'

'And you are wet!'

'I am nearly dry now. I was wet. But, mother, I am tired and fagged. It would do me good if I could get a glass of wine.'

She rang the bell, and gave her orders calmly—though every servant in the house now knew the whole truth,—and then lit a candle herself, and looked at him. 'My child, what have you done to yourself? Oh, Herbert, you will be ill!

And then, with his arm round her waist, she took him up to her own room, and sat by him while he took off his muddy boots and clammy socks, and made him hot drinks, and tended him as she had done when he was a child. And yet she had that day heard of her great ruin! With truth, indeed, had Mr. Prendergast said that she was made of more enduring material than Sir Thomas.

And she endeavoured to persuade him to go to his bed; but in this he would not listen to her. He must, he said, see his father that night. 'You have been with him, mother, since—since—.'

'Oh, yes; directly after Mr. Prendergast left me.'

'Well?'

'He cried like a child, Herbert. We both sobbed together like two children. It was very piteous. But I think I left him better than he has been. He knows now that those men cannot come again to harass him.'

Herbert gnashed his teeth, and clenched his fist as he thought of them; but he could not speak of them, or mention their name before his mother. What must her thoughts be, as she remembered that elder man and looked back to her early childhood!

'He is very weak,' she went on to say: 'almost helplessly weak now, and does not seem to think of leaving his bed. I have begged him to let me

send to Dublin for Sir Henry; but he says that nothing ails him.'

'And who is with him now, mother?'

'The girls are both there.'

'And Mr. Prendergast?'

Lady Fitzgerald then explained to him, that Mr. Prendergast had returned to Dublin that afternoon, starting twenty-four hours earlier than he intended,—or, at any rate, than he had said that he intended. Having done his work there, he had felt that he would now only be in the way. And, moreover, though his work was done at Castle Richmond, other work in the same matter had still to be done in England. Mr. Prendergast had very little doubt as to the truth of Mollett's story;—indeed we may say he had no doubt; otherwise he would hardly have made it known to all that world round Castle Richmond. But nevertheless it behoved him thoroughly to sift the matter. He felt tolerably sure that he should find Mollett in London; and whether he did or no, he should be able to identify, or not to identify, that scoundrel with the Mr. Talbot who had hired Chevy Chase Lodge, in Dorsetshire, and who had undoubtedly married poor Mary Wainwright.

'He left a kind message for you,' said Lady Fitzgerald.—My readers must excuse me if I still call her Lady Fitzgerald, for I cannot bring my

pen to the use of any other name. And it was so also with the dependents and neighbours of Castle Richmond, when the time came that the poor lady felt that she was bound publicly to drop her title. It was not in her power to drop it; no effort that she could make would induce those around her to call her by another name.

‘He bade me say,’ she continued, ‘that if your future course of life should take you to London, you are to go to him, and look to him as another father. He has no child of his own,’ he said, ‘and you shall be to him as a son.’

‘I will be no one’s son but yours,—yours and my father’s,’ he said, again embracing her.

And then, when, under his mother’s eye, he had eaten and drank and made himself warm, he did go to his father and found both his sisters sitting there. They came and clustered round him, taking hold of his hands and looking up into his face, loving him, and pitying him, and caressing him with their eyes; but standing there by their father’s bed, they said little or nothing. Nor did Sir Thomas say much;—except this, indeed, that, just as Herbert was leaving him, he declared with a faint voice, that henceforth his son should be master of that house, and the disposer of that property—‘As long as I live!’ he exclaimed with his weak voice; ‘as long as I live!’

‘No, father; not so.’

‘Yes, yes! as long as I live. It will be little that you will have, even so—very little. But so it shall be as long as I live.’

Very little indeed, poor man, for, alas! his days were numbered.

And then, when Herbert left the room, Emmeline followed him. She had ever been his dearest sister, and now she longed to be with him that she might tell him how she loved him, and comfort him with her tears. And Clara too—Clara whom she had welcomed as a sister!—she must learn now how Clara would behave, for she had already made herself sure that her brother had been at Desmond Court, the herald of his own ruin.

‘May I come with you, Herbert?’ she asked, closing in round him and getting under his arm. How could he refuse her? So they went together and sat over a fire in a small room that was sacred to her and her sister, and there, with many sobs on her part and much would-be brave contempt of poverty on his, they talked over the altered world as it now showed itself before them.

‘And you did not see her?’ she asked, when with many efforts she had brought the subject round to Clara Desmond and her brother’s walk to Desmond Court.

‘No; she left the room at my own bidding. I could not have told it myself to her.’

‘And you cannot know then what she would say?’

‘No, I cannot know what she would say; but I know now what I must say myself. All that is over, Emmeline. I cannot ask her to marry a beggar.’

‘Ask her; no! there will be no need of asking her; she has already given you her promise. You do not think that she will desert you? you do not wish it?’

Herein were contained two distinct questions, the latter of which Herbert did not care to answer. ‘I shall not call it desertion,’ he said; ‘indeed the proposal will come from me. I shall write to her, telling her that she need think about me no longer. Only that I am so weary I would do it now.’

‘And how will she answer you? If she is the Clara that I take her for she will throw your proposal back into your face. She will tell you that it is not in your power to reject her now. She will swear to you, that let your words be what they may, she will think of you—more now than she has ever thought in better days. She will tell you of her love in words that she could not use before. I know she will. I know that she is good, and true, and honest, and generous. Oh, I should die if I thought she were false! But, Herbert, I am sure that she is true. You can write your letter, and we shall see.’

Herbert, with wise arguments learned from his mother, reasoned with his sister, explaining to her that Clara was now by no means bound to cling to him; but as he spoke them his arm fastened itself closely round his sister's waist, for the words which she uttered with so much energy were comfortable to him.

And then, seated there, before he moved from the room, he made her bring him pens, ink, and paper, and he wrote his letter to Clara Desmond. She would fain have stayed with him while he did so, sitting at his feet, and looking into his face, and trying to encourage his hope as to what Clara's answer might be; but this he would not allow; so she went again to her father's room, having succeeded in obtaining a promise that Clara's answer should be shown to her. And the letter, when it was written, copied, and recopied, ran as follows:—

‘Castle Richmond, — night.

‘My dearest Clara,’——It was with great difficulty that he could satisfy himself with that, or indeed with any other mode of commencement. In the short little love-notes which had hitherto gone from him, sent from house to house, he had written to her with appellations of endearment of his own—as all lovers do; and as all lovers seem to think that no lovers have done before themselves—with appellations which are so sweet to

those who write, and so musical to those who read, but which sound so ludicrous when barbarously made public in hideous law courts by brazen-browed lawyers with mercenary tongues. In this way only had he written, and each of these sweet silly songs of love had been as full of honey as words could make it. But he had never yet written to her, on a full sheet of paper, a sensible positive letter containing thoughts and facts, as men do write to women and women also to men, when the lollypops and candied sugar-drops of early love have passed away. Now he was to write his first serious letter to her,—and probably his last,—and it was with difficulty that he could get himself over the first three words; but there they were decided on at last.

‘My dearest Clara,

‘Before you get this your mother will have told you all that which I could not bring myself to speak out yesterday, as long as you were in the room. I am sure you will understand now why I begged you to go away, and will not think the worse of me for doing so. You now know the whole truth, and I am sure that you will feel for us all here.

‘Having thought a good deal upon the matter, chiefly during my walk home from Desmond Court, and indeed since I have been at home, I have come to the resolution that everything be-

tween us must be over. It would be unmanly in me to wish to ruin you because I myself am ruined. Our engagement was, of course, made on the presumption that I should inherit my father's estate; as it is I shall not do so, and, therefore I beg that you will regard that engagement as at an end. Of my own love for you I will say nothing. But I know that you have loved me truly, and that all this, therefore, will cause you great grief. It is better, however, that it should be so, than that I should seek to hold you to a promise which was made under such different circumstances.

‘You will, of course, show this letter to your mother. She, at any rate, will approve of what I am now doing; and so will you when you allow yourself to consider it calmly.

‘We have not known each other so long that there is much for us to give back to each other. If you do not think it wrong I should like still to keep that lock of your hair, to remind me of my first love—and, as I think, my only one. And you, I hope, will not be afraid to have near you the one little present that I made you.

‘And now, dearest Clara, good-bye. Let us always think, each of the other, as of a very dear friend. May God-bless you, and preserve you, and make you happy.

‘Yours, with sincere affection,

‘HERBERT FITZGERALD.’

This, when at last he had succeeded in writing it, he read over and over again; but on each occasion he said to himself that it was cold and passionless, stilted and unmeaning. It by no means pleased him, and seemed as though it could bring but one answer—a cold acquiescence in the proposal which he so coldly made. But yet he knew not how to improve it. And after all it was a true exposition of that which he had determined to say. All the world—her world and his world—would think it better that they should part; and let the struggle cost him what it would, he would teach himself to wish that it might be so—if not for his own sake, then for hers. So he fastened the letter, and taking it with him determined to send it over, so that it should reach Clara quite early on the following morning.

And then having once more visited his father, and once more kissed his mother, he betook himself to bed. It had been with him one of those days which seem to pass away without reference to usual hours and periods. It had been long dark, and he seemed to have been hanging about the house, doing nothing and aiding nobody, till he was weary of himself. So he went off to bed, almost wondering, as he bethought himself of what had happened to him within the last two days, that he was able to bear the burden of his

life so easily as he did. He betook himself to bed ; and with the letter close at his hand, so that he might despatch it when he awoke, he was soon asleep. After all, that walk, terrible as it had been, was in the end serviceable to him.

He slept without waking till the light of the February morning was beginning to dawn into his room, and then he was roused by a servant knocking at the door. It was grievous enough, that awaking to his sorrow after the pleasant dreams of the night.

‘Here is a letter, Mr. Herbert, from Desmond Court,’ said Richard. ‘The boy as brought it says as how—’

‘A letter from Desmond Court,’ said Herbert, putting out his hand greedily.

‘Yes, Mr. Herbert. The boy’s been here this hour and better. I warn’t just up and about myself, or I wouldn’t have let ’em keep it from you, not half a minute.’

‘And where is he ? I have a letter to send to Desmond Court. But never mind. Perhaps—’

‘It’s no good minding, for the gossoon’s gone back any ways.’ And then Richard, having drawn the blind, and placed a little table by the bed-head, left his young master to read the despatch from Desmond Court. Herbert, till he saw the writing, feared that it was from the

countess ; but the letter was from Clara. She also had thought good to write before she betook herself to bed, and she had been earlier in despatching her messenger. Here is her letter :

‘ Dear Herbert, my own Herbert,

‘ I have heard it all. But remember this ; nothing, nothing, *nothing* can make any change between you and me. I will hear of no arguments that are to separate us. I know beforehand what you will say, but I will not regard it—not in the least. I love you ten times the more for all your unhappiness ; and as I would have shared your good fortune, I claim my right to share your bad fortune. *Pray believe me*, that nothing shall turn me from this ; for I will *not be given up*.

‘ Give my kindest love to your dear, dear, dearest mother—my mother, as she is and must be ; and to my darling girls. I do so wish I could be with them, and with you, my own Herbert. I cannot help writing in confusion, but I will explain all when I see you. I have been so unhappy.

‘ Your own faithful

‘ CLARA.’

Having read this, Herbert Fitzgerald, in spite of his affliction, was comforted.

CHAPTER XIV.

FOR A' THAT AND A' THAT.

HERBERT as he started from his bed with this letter in his hand felt that he could yet hold up his head against all that the world could do to him. How could he be really unhappy while he possessed such an assurance of love as this, and while his mother was able to give him so glorious an example of endurance? He was not really unhappy. The low-spirited broken-hearted wretchedness of the preceding day seemed to have departed from him as he hurried on his clothes, and went off to his sister's room that he might show his letter to Emmeline in accordance with the promise he had made her.

'May I come in?' he said, knocking at the door. 'I must come in, for I have something to show you.' But the two girls were dressing and he could not be admitted. Emmeline, however, promised to come to him, and in about three minutes she was out in the cold little sitting-room

which adjoined their bed-room with her slippers on, and her dressing gown wrapped round her, an object presentable to no male eyes but those of her brother.

‘Emmeline,’ said he, ‘I have got a letter this morning.’

‘Not from Clara?’

‘Yes, from Clara. There; you may read it;’ and he handed her the precious epistle.

‘But she could not have got your letter?’ said Emmeline, before she looked at the one in her hand.

‘Certainly not, for I have it here. I must write another now; but in truth I do not know what to say. I can be as generous as she is.’

And then his sister read the letter. ‘My own Clara!’ she exclaimed, as she saw what was the tenor of it. ‘Did I not tell you so, Herbert? I knew well what she would do and say. Love you ten times better!—of course she does. What honest girl would not? My own beautiful Clara, I knew I could depend on her. I did not doubt her for one moment.’ But in this particular it must be acknowledged that Miss Emmeline Fitzgerald hardly confined herself to the strictest veracity, for she had lain awake half the night perplexed with doubt. What, oh what, if Clara should be untrue! Such had been the burden of her doubting midnight thoughts. ‘“I will not be given up,”’ she continued, quoting the letter.

“No; of course not. And I tell you what, Herbert, you must not dare to talk of giving her up. Money and titles may be tossed to and fro, but not hearts. How beautifully she speaks of dear mamma!’ and now the tears began to run down the young lady’s cheeks. ‘Oh, I do wish she could be with us! My darling, darling, darling Clara! Unhappy? Yes: I am sure Lady Desmond will give her no peace. But never mind. She will be true through it all; and I said so from the first.’ And then she fell to crying, and embracing her brother, and declaring that nothing now should make her altogether unhappy.

‘But, Emmeline, you must not think that I shall take her at her word. It is very generous of her—’

‘Nonsense, Herbert!’ And then there was another torrent of eloquence, in answering which Herbert found that his arguments were of very little efficacy.

And now we must go back to Desmond Court, and see under what all but overwhelming difficulties poor Clara wrote her affectionate letter. And in the first place it should be pointed out how very wrong Herbert had been in going to Desmond Court on foot, through the mud and rain. A man can hardly bear himself nobly unless his outer aspect be in some degree noble. It may be very sad, this having to admit that the

tailor does in great part make the man ; but such I fear is undoubtedly the fact. Could the Chancellor look dignified on the woolsack, if he had had an accident with his wig, or allowed his robes to be torn or soiled ? Does not half the piety of a bishop reside in his lawn sleeves, and all his meekness in his anti-virile apron ? Had Herbert understood the world he would have had out the best pair of horses standing in the Castle Richmond stables, when going to Desmond Court on such an errand. He would have brushed his hair, and anointed himself ; he would have clothed himself in his rich Spanish cloak ; he would have seen that his hat was brushed, and his boots spotless ; and then with all due solemnity but with head erect, he would have told his tale out boldly. The countess would still have wished to be rid of him, hearing that he was a pauper ; but she would have lacked the courage to turn him from the house as she had done.

But seeing how woe-begone he was and wretched, how mean to look at, and low in his outward presence, she had been able to assume the mastery, and had kept it throughout the interview. And having done this her opinion of his prowess naturally became low, and she felt that he would have been unable to press his cause against her.

For some time after he had departed, she sat alone in the room in which she had received him.

She expected every minute that Clara would come down to her, still wishing however that she might be left for a while alone. But Clara did not come, and she was able to pursue her thoughts.

How very terrible was this tragedy that had fallen out in her close neighbourhood! That was the first thought that came to her now that Herbert had left her. How terrible, overwhelming, and fatal! What calamity could fall upon a woman so calamitous as this which had now overtaken that poor lady at Castle Richmond? Could she live and support such a burden? Could she bear the eyes of people, when she knew the light in which she must be now regarded? To lose at one blow, her name, her pride of place, her woman's rank and high respect! Could it be possible that she would still live on? It was thus that Lady Desmond thought; and had any one told her that this degraded mother would that very day come down from her room, and sit watchful by her sleeping son, in order that she might comfort and encourage him when he awoke, she would not have found it in her heart to believe such a marvel. But then Lady Desmond knew but one solace in her sorrows—had but one comfort in her sad reflections. She was Countess of Desmond, and that was all. To Lady Fitzgerald had been vouchsafed other solace and other comforts.

And then, on one point the countess made herself fixed as fate, by thinking and re-thinking upon it till no doubt remained upon her mind. The match between Clara and Herbert must be broken off, let the cost be what it might ; and—a point on which there was more room for doubt, and more pain in coming to a conclusion—that other match with the more fortunate cousin must be encouraged and carried out. For herself, if her hope was small while Owen was needy and of poor account, what hope could there be now that he would be rich and great? Moreover, Owen loved Clara, and not herself; and Clara's hand would once more be vacant and ready for the winning. For herself, her only chance had been in Clara's coming marriage.

In all this she knew that there would be difficulty. She was sure enough that Clara would at first feel the imprudent generosity of youth, and offer to join her poverty to Herbert's poverty. That was a matter of course. She, Lady Desmond herself, would have done this, at Clara's age,—so at least to herself she said, and also to her daughter. But a little time, and a little patience, and a little care would set all this in a proper light. Herbert would go away and would gradually be forgotten. Owen would again come forth from beneath the clouds, with renewed splendour ; and then, was it not probable that, in

her very heart of hearts, Owen was the man whom Clara had ever loved ?

And thus having realized to herself the facts which Herbert had told her, she prepared to make them known to her daughter. She got up from her chair, intending at first to seek her, and then, changing her purpose, rang the bell and sent for her. She was astonished to find how violently she herself was affected ; not so much by the circumstances, as by this duty which had fallen to her of telling them to her child. She put one hand upon the other and felt that she herself was in a tremor, and was conscious that the blood was running quick round her heart. Clara came down, and going to her customary seat waited till her mother should speak to her.

‘Mr. Fitzgerald has brought very dreadful news,’ Lady Desmond said, after a minute’s pause.

‘Oh mamma!’ said Clara. She had expected bad tidings, having thought of all manner of miseries while she had been up stairs alone ; but there was that in her mother’s voice which seemed to be worse than the worst of her anticipations.

‘Dreadful, indeed, my child ! It is my duty to tell them to you ; but I must caution you, before I do so, to place a guard upon your feelings. That which I have to say must necessarily alter all your

future prospects, and, unfortunately, make your marrying Herbert Fitzgerald quite impossible.'

'Mamma!' she exclaimed, with a loud voice, jumping from her chair. 'Not marry him! Why; what can he have done? Is it his wish to break it off?'

Lady Desmond had calculated that she would best effect her object by at once impressing her daughter with the idea that, under the circumstances which were about to be narrated, this marriage would not only be imprudent, but altogether impracticable and out of the question. Clara must be made to understand at once, that the circumstances gave her no option,—that the affair was of such a nature as to make it a thing manifest to everybody, that she could not now marry Herbert Fitzgerald. She must not be left to think whether she could, or whether she could not, exercise her own generosity. And therefore, not without discretion, the countess announced at once to her the conclusion at which it would be necessary to arrive. But Clara was not a girl to adopt such a conclusion on any other judgment than her own, or to be led in such a matter by the feelings of any other person.

'Sit down, my dear, and I will explain it all. But, dearest Clara, grieved as I must be to grieve you, I am bound to tell you again that it must be as I say. For both your sakes it must be so;

but especially, perhaps, for his. But when I have told you my story, you will understand that this must be so.'

'Tell me, then, mother.' She said this, for Lady Desmond had again paused.

'Won't you sit down, dearest?'

'Well, yes; it does not matter;' and Clara, at her mother's bidding, sat down, and then the story was told to her.

It was a difficult tale for a mother to tell to so young a child—to a child whom she had regarded as being so very young. There were various little points of law which she thought that she was obliged to explain; how it was necessary that the Castle Richmond property should go to an heir-at-law, and how it was impossible that Herbert should be that heir-at-law, seeing that he had not been born in lawful wedlock. All these things Lady Desmond attempted to explain, or was about to attempt such explanation, but desisted on finding that her daughter understood them as well as she herself did. And then she had to make it also intelligible to Clara that Owen would be called on, when Sir Thomas should die, to fill the position and enjoy the wealth accruing to the heir of Castle Richmond. When Owen Fitzgerald's name was mentioned a slight blush came upon Clara's cheek; it was very slight, but nevertheless her mother saw it, and took

advantage of it to say a word in Owen's favour.

'Poor Owen!' she said. 'He will not be the first to triumph in this change of fortune.'

'I am sure he will not,' said Clara. 'He is much too generous for that.' And then the countess began to hope that the task might not be so very difficult. Ignorant woman! Had she been able to read one page in her daughter's heart, she would have known that the task was impossible. After that the story was told out to the end without further interruption; and then Clara, hiding her face within her hands on the head of the sofa, uttered one long piteous moan.

'It is all very dreadful,' said the countess.

'Oh, Lady Fitzgerald, dear Lady Fitzgerald!' sobbed forth Clara.

'Yes, indeed. Poor Lady Fitzgerald! Her fate is so dreadful that I know not how to think of it.'

'But, mamma—' and as she spoke Clara pushed back from her forehead her hair with both her hands, showing, as she did so, the form of her forehead, and the firmness of purpose that was written there, legible to any eyes that could read. 'But, mamma, you are wrong about my not marrying Herbert Fitzgerald. Why should I not marry him? Not now, as we, perhaps, might have done but for this; but at some future time when he

may think himself able to support a wife. Mamma, I shall not break our engagement; certainly not.'

This was said in a tone of voice so very decided that Lady Desmond had to acknowledge to herself that there would be difficulty in her task. But she still did not doubt that she would have her way, if not by concession on the part of her daughter, then by concession on the part of Herbert Fitzgerald. 'I can understand your generosity of feeling, my dear,' she said; 'and at your age I should probably have felt the same. And therefore I do not ask you to take any steps towards breaking your engagement. The offer must come from Mr. Fitzgerald, and I have no doubt that it will come. He, as a man of honour, will know that he cannot now offer to marry you; and he will also know, as a man of sense, that it would be ruin for him to think of—of such a marriage under his present circumstances.'

'Why, mamma? Why should it be ruin to him?'

'Why, my dear? Do you think that a wife with a titled name can be of advantage to a young man who has not only got his bread to earn, but even to look out for a way in which he may earn it?'

'If there be nothing to hurt him but the

titled name, that difficulty shall be easily conquered.'

'Dearest Clara, you know what I mean. You must be aware that a girl of your rank, and brought up as you have been, cannot be a fitting wife for a man who will now have to struggle with the world at every turn.'

Clara, as this was said to her, and as she prepared to answer, blushed deeply, for she felt herself obliged to speak on a matter which had never yet been subject of speech between her and her mother. 'Mamma,' she said, 'I cannot agree with you there. I may have what the world calls rank; but nevertheless we have been poor, and I have not been brought up with costly habits. Why should I not live with my husband as—as—as poorly as I have lived with my mother? You are not rich, dear mamma, and why should I be?'

Lady Desmond did not answer her daughter at once; but she was not silent because an answer failed her. Her answer would have been ready enough had she dared to speak it out. 'Yes, it is true; we have been poor. I, your mother, did by my imprudence bring down upon my head and on yours absolute, unrelenting, pitiless poverty. And because I did so, I have never known one happy hour. I have spent my days in bitter remorse—in regretting the want of those

things which it has been the more terrible to want as they are the customary attributes of people of my rank. I have been driven to hate those around me who have been rich, because I have been poor. I have been utterly friendless because I have been poor. I have been able to do none of those sweet, soft, lovely things, by doing which other women win the smiles of the world, because I have been poor. Poverty and rank together have made me wretched—have left me without employment, without society, and without love. And now would you tell me that because I have been poor you would choose to be poor also ?' It would have been thus that she would have answered, had she been accustomed to speak out her thoughts. But she had ever been accustomed to conceal them.

'I was thinking quite as much of him as of you,' at last she said. 'Such an engagement to you would be fraught with much misery, but to him it would be ruinous.'

'I do not think it, mamma.'

'But it is not necessary, Clara, that you should do anything. You will wait, of course, and see what Herbert may say himself.'

'Herbert—'

'Wait half a moment, my love. I shall be very much surprised if we do not find that Mr.

Fitzgerald himself will tell you that the match must be abandoned.'

'But that will make no difference, mamma.'

'No difference, my dear! You cannot marry him against his will. You do not mean to say that you would wish to bind him to his engagement, if he himself thought it would be to his disadvantage?'

'Yes; I will bind him to it.'

'Clara!'

'I will make him know that it is not for his disadvantage. I will make him understand that a friend and companion who loves him as I love him—as no one else will ever love him now—for I love him because he was so high-fortuned when he came to me, and because he is now so low-fortuned—that such a wife as I will be, cannot be a burden to him. I will cling to him whether he throws me off or no. A word from him might have broken our engagement before, but a thousand words cannot do it now.'

Lady Desmond stared at her daughter, for Clara, in her excitement, was walking up and down the room. The countess had certainly not expected all this, and she was beginning to think that the subject for the present might as well be left alone. But Clara had not done as yet.

'Mamma,' she said, 'I will not do anything without telling you; but I cannot leave Herbert

in all his misery to think that I have no sympathy with him. I shall write to him.'

'Not before he writes to you, Clara! You would not wish to be indelicate?'

'I know but little about delicacy—what people call delicacy; but I will not be ungenerous or unkind. Mamma, you brought us two together. Was it not so? Did you not do so, fearing that I might—might still care for Herbert's cousin? You did it; and half wishing to obey you, half attracted by all his goodness, I did learn to love Herbert Fitzgerald; and I did learn to forget—no; but I learned to cease to love his cousin. You did this and rejoiced at it; and now what you did must remain done.'

'But, dearest Clara, it will not be for his good.'

'It shall be for his good. Mamma, I would not desert him now for all that the world could give me. Neither for mother nor brother could I do that. Without your leave I would not have given him the right to regard me as his own; but now I cannot take that right back again, even at your wish. I must write to him at once, mamma, and tell him this.'

'Clara, at any rate you must not do that; that at least I must forbid.'

'Mother, you cannot forbid it now,' the daughter said, after walking twice the length of the

room in silence. 'If I be not allowed to send a letter, I shall leave the house and go to him.'

This was all very dreadful. Lady Desmond was astounded at the manner in which her daughter carried herself, and the voice with which she spoke. The form of her face was altered, and the very step with which she trod was unlike her usual gait. What would Lady Desmond do? She was not prepared to confine her daughter as a prisoner, nor could she publicly forbid the people about the place to go upon her message.

'I did not expect that you would have been so undutiful,' she said.

'I hope I am not so,' Clara answered. 'But now my first duty is to him. Did you not sanction our loving each other? People cannot call back their hearts and their pledges.'

'You will at any rate wait till to-morrow, Clara.'

'It is dark now,' said Clara, despondingly, looking out through the window upon the falling night; I suppose I cannot send to-night.'

'And you will show me what you write, dearest?'

'No, mamma. If I wrote it for your eyes it could not be the same as if I wrote it only for his.'

Very gloomy, sombre, and silent, was the Countess of Desmond all that night. Nothing further was said about the Fitzgeralds between

her and her daughter, before they went to bed ; and then Lady Desmond did speak a few futile words.

‘Clara,’ she said. ‘You had better think over what we have been saying, in bed to-night. You will be more collected to-morrow morning.’

‘I shall think of it of course,’ said Clara ; ‘but thinking can make no difference,’ and then just touching her mother’s forehead with her lips she went off slowly to her room.

What sort of a letter she wrote when she got there, we have already seen ; and have seen also that she took effective steps to have her letter carried to Castle Richmond at an hour sufficiently early in the morning. There was no danger that the countess would stop the message, for the letter had been read twenty times by Emmeline and Mary, and had been carried by Herbert to his mother’s room, before Lady Desmond had left her bed. ‘Do not set your heart on it too warmly,’ said Herbert’s mother to him.

‘But is she not excellent?’ said Herbert. ‘It is because she speaks of you in such a way—’

‘You would not wish to bring her into misery, because of her excellence.’

‘But, mother, I am still a man,’ said Herbert. This was too much for the suffering woman, the one fault of whose life had brought her son to such a pass, and throwing her arm round his neck she wept upon his shoulders.

There were other messengers went and came that day between Desmond Court and Castle Richmond. Clara and her mother saw nothing of each other early in the morning; they did not breakfast together, nor was there a word said between them on the subject of the Fitzgeralds. But Lady Desmond early in the morning—early for her that is—sent her note also to Castle Richmond. It was addressed to Aunt Letty, Miss Letitia Fitzgerald, and went to say that Lady Desmond was very anxious to see Miss Letty. Under the present circumstances of the family, as described to Lady Desmond by Mr. Herbert Fitzgerald, she felt that she could not ask to see 'his mother';—it was thus that she overcame the difficulty which presented itself to her as to the proper title now to be given to Lady Fitzgerald;—but perhaps Miss Letty would be good enough to see her, if she called at such and such an hour. Aunt Letty, much perplexed, had nothing for it, but to say that she would see her. The countess must now be looked on as closely connected with the family—at any rate until that match were broken off; and therefore Aunt Letty had no alternative. And so, precisely at the hour named, the countess and Aunt Letty were seated together in the little breakfast-room of which mention has before been made.

No two women were ever closeted together who

CHAPTER XV.

ILL NEWS FLIES FAST.

A DULL, cold, wretched week passed over their heads at Castle Richmond, during which they did nothing but realize the truth of their position; and then came a letter from Mr. Prendergast, addressed to Herbert, in which he stated that such inquiries as he had hitherto made left no doubt on his mind that the man named Mollett, who had lately made repeated visits at Castle Richmond, was he who had formerly taken the house in Dorsetshire under the name of Talbot. In his packet Mr. Prendergast sent copies of documents and of verbal evidence which he had managed to obtain; but with the actual details of these it is not necessary that I should trouble those who are following me in this story. In this letter Mr. Prendergast also recommended that some intercourse should be had with Owen Fitzgerald. It was expedient, he said, that all the parties concerned should re-

cognise Owen's position as the heir presumptive to the title and estate; and as he, he said, had found Mr. Fitzgerald of Hap House to be forbearing, generous, and high-spirited, he thought that this intercourse might be conducted without enmity or ill blood. And then he suggested that Mr. Somers should see Owen Fitzgerald.

All this Herbert explained to his father gently and without complaint; but it seemed now as though Sir Thomas had ceased to interest himself in the matter. Such battle as it had been in his power to make he had made to save his son's heritage and his wife's name and happiness, even at the expense of his own conscience. That battle had gone altogether against him, and now there was nothing left for him but to turn his face to the wall and die. Absolute ruin, through his fault, had come upon him and all that belonged to him,—ruin that would now be known to the world at large; and it was beyond his power to face that world again. In that the glory was gone from the house of his son, and of his son's mother, the glory was gone from his own house. He made no attempt to leave his bed, though strongly recommended so to do by his own family doctor. And then a physician came down from Dublin, who could only feel, whatever he might say, how impossible it is to administer to a mind diseased. The mind of that

poor man was diseased past all curing in this world, and there was nothing left for him but to die.

Herbert, of course, answered Clara's letter, but he did not go over to see her during that week, nor indeed for some little time afterwards. He answered it at considerable length, professing his ready willingness to give back to Clara her troth, and even recommending her, with very strong logic and unanswerable arguments of worldly sense, to regard their union as unwise and even impossible; but nevertheless there protruded through all his sense and all his rhetoric, evidences of love and of a desire for love returned, which were much more unanswerable than his arguments, and much stronger than his logic. Clara read his letter, not as he would have advised her to read it, but certainly in the manner which best pleased his heart, and answered it again, declaring that all that he said was no avail. He might be false to her if he would. If through fickleness of heart and purpose he chose to abandon her, she would never complain—never at least aloud. But she would not be false to him; nor were her inclinations such as to make it likely that she should be fickle, even though her affection might be tried by a delay of years. Love with her had been too serious to be thrown

All which was rather strong language on

the part of a young lady, but was thought by those other young ladies at Castle Richmond to show the very essence of becoming young-ladyhood. They pronounced Clara to be perfect in feeling and in judgment, and Herbert could not find it in his heart to contradict them.

And of all these doings, writings, and resolves, Clara dutifully told her mother. Poor Lady Desmond was at her wits' end in the matter. She could scold her daughter, but she had no other power of doing anything. Clara had so taken the bit between her teeth that it was no longer possible to check her with any usual rein. In these days young ladies are seldom deprived by force of paper, pen, and ink ; and the absolute incarceration of such an offender would be still more unusual. Another countess would have taken her daughter away, either to London and a series of balls, or to the South of Italy, or to the family castle in the North of Scotland ; but poor Lady Desmond had not the power of other countesses. Now that it was put to the trial, she found that she had no power, even over her own daughter. 'Mamma, it was your own doing.' Clara would say ; and the countess would feel that this alluded not only to her daughter's engagement with Herbert the disinherited, but also to her non-engagement with Owen the heir.

Under these circumstances Lady Desmond sent

for her son. The earl was still at Eton, but was now grown to be almost a man—such a man as forward Eton boys are at sixteen — tall, and lathy, and handsome, with soft incipient whiskers, a bold brow and blushing cheeks, with all a boy's love for frolic still strong within him, but some touch of a man's pride to check it. In her difficulty Lady Desmond sent for the young earl, who had now not been home since the previous midsummer, hoping that his young manhood might have some effect in saving his sister from the disgrace of a marriage which would make her so totally bankrupt both in wealth and rank.

Mr. Somers did go once to Hap House, at Herbert's instigation ; but very little came of his visit. He had always disliked Owen, regarding him as an unthrift, any close connexion with whom could only bring contamination on the Fitzgerald property ; and Owen had returned the feeling tenfold. His pride had been wounded by what he had considered to be the agent's insolence, and he had stigmatised Mr. Somers to his friends as a self-seeking, mercenary prig. Very little, therefore, came of the visit. Mr. Somers, to give him his due, had attempted to do his best ; being anxious, for Herbert's sake, to conciliate Owen ; perhaps having—and why not?—some eye to the future agency. But Owen was hard, and cold, and uncommunicative,—very un-

like what he had before been to Mr. Prendergast. But then Mr. Prendergast had never offended his pride.

‘You may tell my cousin Herbert,’ he said, with some little special emphasis on the word cousin, ‘that I shall be glad to see him, as soon as he feels himself able to meet me. It will be for the good of us both that we should have some conversation together. Will you tell him, Mr. Somers, that I shall be happy to go to him, or to see him here? Perhaps my going to Castle Richmond, during the present illness of Sir Thomas, may be inconvenient.’ And this was all that Mr. Somers could get from him.

In a very short time the whole story became known to everybody round the neighbourhood. And what would have been the good of keeping it secret? There are some secrets,—kept as secrets because they cannot well be discussed openly,—which may be allowed to leak out with so much advantage! The day must come, and that apparently at no distant time, when all the world would know the fate of that Fitzgerald family; when Sir Owen must walk into the hall of Castle Richmond, the undoubted owner of the mansion and demesne. Why then keep it secret? Herbert openly declared his wish to Mr. Somers that there should be no secret in the matter. ‘There is no disgrace,’ he said, thinking of his

mother ; ' nothing to be ashamed of, let the world say what it will.'

Down in the servants' hall the news came to them gradually, whispered about from one to another. They hardly understood what it meant, or how it had come to pass ; but they did know that their master's marriage had been no marriage, and that their master's son was no heir. Mrs. Jones said not a word in the matter to any one. Indeed, since that day on which she had been confronted with Mollett, she had not associated with the servants at all, but had kept herself close to her mistress. She understood what it all meant perfectly ; and the depth of the tragedy had so cowed her spirit that she hardly dared to speak of it. Who told the servants,—or who does tell servants of such matters, it is impossible to say ; but before Mr. Prendergast had been three days out of the house they all knew that the Mr. Owen of Hap House was to be the future master of Castle Richmond.

' An' a sore day it'll be ; a sore day, a sore day,' said Richard, seated in an arm-chair by the fire, at the end of the servants' hall, shaking his head despondingly.

' Faix, an' you may say that,' said Corney, the footman. ' That Mистер Owen will go tatthering away to the devil, when the old place comes into his hans. No fear he'll make it fly.'

'Sorrow seize the ould lawyer for coming down here at all at all,' said the cook.

'I never knew no good come of thim dry ould bachelors,' said Biddy the housemaid; 'specially the Englishers.'

'The two of yez are no better nor simpletons,' said Richard, magisterially. 'Twarn't he that done it. The likes of him couldn't do the likes o' that.'

'And what was it as done it?' said Biddy.

'Ax no questions, and may be you'll be tould no lies,' replied Richard.

'In course we all knows it's along of her ladyship's marriage which warn't no marriage,' said the cook. 'May the heavens be her bed when the Lord takes her! A betther lady nor a kinder-hearted niver stepped the floor of a kitchen.'

'Deed an that's thrue for you, cook,' said Biddy, with the corner of her apron up to her eyes. 'But tell me, Richard, won't poor Mr. Herbert have nothing?'

'Never you mind about Mr. Herbert,' said Richard, who had seen Biddy grow up from a slip of a girl, and therefore was competent to snub her at every word.

'Ah, but I do mind,' said the girl. 'I minds more about him than ere a one of 'em; and av' that Lady Clara won't have em a cause of this—'

'Not a step she won't, thin,' said Corney.

‘She’ll go back to Mr. Owen. He was her fust love. You’ll see else.’ And so the matter was discussed in the servants’ hall at the great house.

But perhaps the greatest surprise, the greatest curiosity, and the greatest consternation, were felt at the parsonage. The rumour reached Mr. Townsend at one of the Relief Committees;—and Mrs. Townsend from the mouth of one of her servants, during his absence, on the same day; and when Mr. Townsend returned to the parsonage, they met each other with blank faces.

‘Oh, Æneas!’ said she, before she could get his greatcoat from off his shoulders, ‘have you heard the news?’

‘What news?—about Castle Richmond?’

‘Yes; about Castle Richmond.’ And then she knew that he had heard it.

Some glimmering of Lady Fitzgerald’s early history had been known to both of them, as it had been known almost to all in the country; but in late years this history had been so much forgotten, that men had ceased to talk of it, and this calamity therefore came with all the weight of a new misfortune.

‘And, Æneas, who told you of it?’ she asked, as they sat together over the fire, in their dingy, dirty parlour.

‘Well, strange to say, I heard it first from Father Barney.’

‘Oh, mercy ! and is it all about the country in that way?’

‘Herbert, you know, has not been at any one of the Committees for the last ten days, and Mr. Somers, for the last week past has been as silent as death ; so much so, that that horrid creature, Father Columb, would have made a regular set speech the other day at Gortnaclough, if I hadn’t put him down.’

‘Dear, dear, dear !’ said Mrs. Townsend.

‘And I was talking to Father Barney about this, to-day—about Mr. Somers, that is.’

‘Yes, yes, yes !’

‘And then he said, “I suppose you know what has happened at Castle Richmond?”’

‘How on earth had he learned?’ asked Mrs. Townsend, jealous that a Roman Catholic priest should have heard such completely Protestant news before the Protestant parson and his wife.

‘Oh, they learn everything—from the servants I suppose.’

‘Of course, the mean creatures!’ said Mrs. Townsend, forgetting, probably, her own little conversation with her own man of all work that morning. ‘But go on, Æneas.’

“What has happened,” said I, “at Castle Richmond?” “Oh, you haven’t heard,” said he. And I was obliged to own that I had not, though

I saw that it gave him a kind of triumph. "Why," said he, "very bad news has reached them indeed; the worst of news." And then he told me about Lady Fitzgerald. To give him his due, I must say that he was very sorry—very sorry. "The poor young fellow!" he said—"The poor young fellow!" And I saw that he turned away his face to hide a tear.'

'Crocodile tears!' said Mrs. Townsend.

'No, they were not,' said her reverend lord; 'and Father Barney is not so bad as I once thought him.'

'I hope you are not going over too, Æneas?' And his consort almost cried as such a horrid thought entered her head. In her ideas any feeling short of absolute enmity to a servant of the Church of Rome was an abandonment of some portion of the Protestant basis of the Church of England. 'The small end of the wedge,' she would call it, when people around her would suggest that the heart of a Roman Catholic priest might possibly not be altogether black and devilish.

'Well, I hope not, my dear,' said Mr. Townsend, with a slight touch of sarcasm in his voice. 'But, as I was saying, Father Barney told me then that this Mr. Prendergast—'

'Oh, I had known of his being there from the day of his coming.'

‘This Mr. Prendergast, it seems, knew the whole affair, from beginning to end.’

‘But how did he know it, Æneas?’

‘That I can’t tell you. He was a friend of Sir Thomas before his marriage; I know that. And he has told them that it is of no use their attempting to keep it secret. He was over at Hap House with Owen Fitzgerald before he went.

‘And has Owen Fitzgerald been told?’

‘Yes; he has been told—told that he is to be the next heir; so Father Barney says.’

Mrs. Townsend wished in her heart that the news could have reached her through a purer source; but all this, coming though it did from Father Barney, tallied too completely with what she herself had heard to leave on her mind any doubt of its truth. And then she began to think of Lady Fitzgerald and her condition, of Herbert and of his, and of the condition of them all, till by degrees her mind passed away from Father Barney and all his iniquities.

‘It is very dreadful,’ she said, in a low voice.

‘Very dreadful, very dreadful. I hardly know how to think of it. And I fear that Sir Thomas will not live many months to give them even the benefit of his life interest.’

‘And when he dies all will be gone?’

‘Everything.’

And then tears stood in her eyes also, and in

his also after a while. It is very easy for a clergyman in his pulpit to preach eloquently upon the vileness of worldly wealth, and the futility of worldly station; but where will you ever find one, who, when the time of proof shall come, will give proof that he himself feels what he preaches? Mr. Townsend was customarily loud and eager upon this subject, and yet he was now shedding tears because his young friend Herbert was deprived of his inheritance.

END OF VOL. II.





